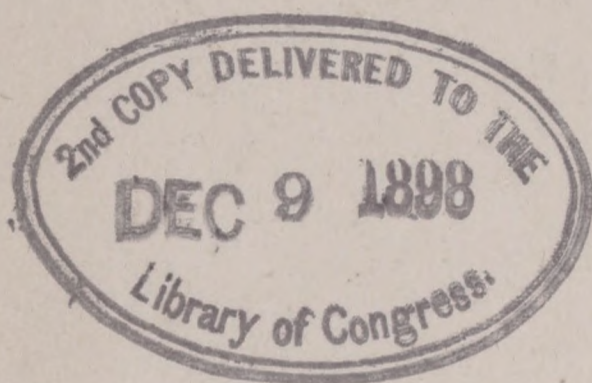




BELINDA – AND  
SOME OTHERS



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BELINDA—AND SOME OTHERS







# BELINDA—AND SOME OTHERS

*Ethel "Maudie" .*



NEW YORK  
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY  
1898



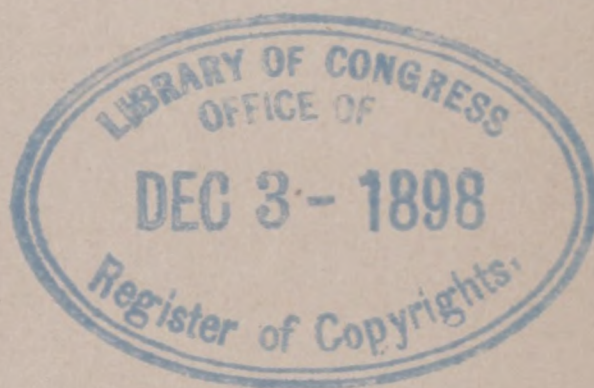
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# BELINDA—AND SOME OTHERS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### HALF-A-DOZEN.

WE were half-a-dozen, four girls and two boys. Our parents had a fancy for names terminating in *a*, but after christening me Maria, their memory proved unequal to the strain of four daughters, and they had recourse to novels for suggestions. Hence a Belinda, an Olivia, and a Pamela. The boys answered to the more every-day titles of William and Jack.

About our ages there were two points to remember. First, that Pamela was barely seventeen, and the youngest; secondly, that we were said to be the only annuals on record ever known to become perennials.



Olivia, next in age to Pamela, was quick at assimilating modern notions. She tried to persuade us that small families at large distances are considered better form than the old-fashioned yearly method, and pointed out how by a little judicious rearrangement and borrowing a few years from the future, we could contrive to fall in with more recent ideas on population. Thus, Pamela was to remain seventeen—at which she grumbled a little; Olivia herself to move on to nineteen; William to twenty-one; Belinda to twenty-three; Jack to twenty-five; and I to twenty-seven.

For once in our lives Belinda and I agreed. We snubbed Olivia, telling her we preferred to keep young and yet be out of date, when, nothing daunted, she hazarded that we should pair off in three lots of twins or two triplets. We might take our choice or decide by vote. But to this Jack objected. He said if we were orphans that was no rea-



son why we should be ridiculous, and begged Olivia to confine her theories on population to the cat.

We lived at Riverside Court. The house and gardens, large, old-fashioned and picturesque, belonged to Uncle Joshua. We seldom spoke of him except to strangers; then "our Uncle in South Africa" came in handy as a peg to hang small talk upon and put us in touch with the outside world, for in this last decade of the century we had gained the notion that everything which was not Japanese was South African, and *vice versâ*.

When Uncle's letter came saying he was returning to take possession of his own after an absence of twenty-five years, we called a family parliament to discuss the situation. Having all been born and grown up in "The Court," this sudden facing of the fact that though ours by habitation, association, and spoliation, legally it was Joshua Chilcott's—his and his alone—rather overwhelmed us



and checked that flow of high spirits, ever our cheerful characteristic. Even Jinks was subdued.

Jinks would have been a Yorkshire terrier had not his intentions been frustrated. When extreme youth prevented anyone deciding his exact value save his first owner, who turned out to be mistaken in assessing it at twelve guineas, Jinks was bought by a great friend of ours to be used as a muff-warmer. Shortly, she sent him to Belinda, saying he grew at such a rate she felt sure in time he would be a Newfoundland. Belinda hoped he would, but unfortunately his development ceased when too large for any of the smaller breed of dogs and too small for any of the larger. He retained a few of the Yorkshire points about the head, but his body and legs no one was ever able to qualify. His temper was above reproach, and we loved him none the less that his appearance was unique even for a mongrel.



We had always known that Riverside Court belonged to uncle, that in fact we were keeping it warm for him. But after so many years some of the warmth—of possession—had stolen unawares into our own souls. We had, too, always fallen back on the reflection that no South African millionaire would care to live in such a tumble-down old place.

We had no authority for believing our relative a millionaire. It was just part of our way to look on the bright side of things.

William said, now and again, we must not forget that Americans—and if Americans, why not Africans?—will go into ecstasies over picturesque dilapidations and give fabulous prices for an air of ancient discomfort, combined with draughts, such as haunted The Court. But then William's notions were out of harmony with the rest of the family's. He was so intensely practical from his youth up, that we suspected him of being



a changeling. His temperament belonged to the era of wool mats and glass cases, and he was entirely without the artistic tendencies with which his sisters and brothers were richly endowed.

But to return to Uncle.

His coming home at all was a surprise. When we learned that he would put foot on English soil as poor a man as when he left it, we were grieved as well as surprised. His personal appearance, however, proved the greatest shock we had to encounter. We expected what is termed "a burly man," topped by a pleasant rosy face, and surrounded by a hearty—even noisy—manner. One who might possibly wear side-whiskers, and probably a thick gold watch-chain; who would laugh immoderately at his own jokes and never see his neighbour's. His alphabet would be badly arranged. The letter *h*, for instance, would constantly be detected in the wrong place. At first, we should feel a trifle



ashamed of this rough diamond; later, his sterling qualities, aided by a large fortune—brought over in the original nuggets—would oust this false pride and we should value him accordingly.

Belinda, whose artistic tendencies were balanced by some other qualities, was not sure about the *h*. She said the abuse of this letter is an hereditary failing, like insanity or consumption; but being less interesting, it is not so often mentioned by descendants. Now, neither of our grandparents were known to have been wanting in aspirates; why therefore should Joshua, their eldest son? At any rate, she, for one, would hope for the best.

Uncle arrived, pale, small, and thin; clean-shaven, save for a slight moustache, and speaking with a pedantic nicety as to his choice of words in a hesitating manner.

He knew more about current events than we did; but of course one is obliged to read up home news when abroad, or it would look



as if you could not afford a paper. He wrote again on landing at Liverpool, asking us to get the house ready for him, but begging us not to leave until he had made our acquaintance; though he intimated, apologetically, that we should have to find another home, as he hardly felt justified in supporting half a dozen.

Along with our artistic tendencies we had inherited two hundred pounds a year, which divided by six gave us each thirty-three pounds annually. Some said there was a lawyer's fee round as well. I took this statement on trust, owning a dislike to figures. We had lived rent free for so long, surrounded by a garden which thrived upon neglect and produced vegetables and weeds with the same reckless impartiality, that we had never realised what in an elastic sum our income was. William too, though he slept openly—*i. e.* with his mouth open—when we discussed the wailings of the last minor poet, was intelli-



gent at keeping the hens up to their duty, and understood the ways of pigs with a thoroughness that suggested a weakness for bacon and considerably reduced the household expenses.

For the first time in our remembrance finance assumed a really serious aspect.

“We must go to London,” said Belinda, who, though not the eldest, had, by long usurpation, gained the right of speaking first on every matter. “There is so much more scope for talent in London. With what income we have and what we shall make we might manage very well. I have prepared a little estimate of expenses.”

She pulled a bit of paper out of her pocket and read out:—

““ Rent . . . .	£40	0	0
Housekeeping .	75	0	0
Dress for four .	60	0	0
Servant . . . .	15	0	0
Five dogs' licenses	1	17	6
<hr/>			
Total .	£191	17	6'



“There’s eight pounds two-and-six-pence over,” she concluded modestly. “But of course unexpected expenses are sure to crop up. You see I haven’t calculated anything beyond food and lodging for the boys—of course they will make their own pocket money.”

“You haven’t calculated for the rates and taxes either,” replied William. “And one pound seventeen-and-six for dogs’ licenses seems a large item compared with thirty bob a week for housekeeping—I don’t think we can take the puppies.”

Belinda was silent. She had a theory that people only argue when they mean to give in. She had every intention of taking the four collie puppies, whose mother had died with brown eyes pleading humanly with us to guard her children.

Jack looked glum. “I shall have to give up Art, and take to Caricature,” he sighed despondently.



“ You might begin with William,” replied Belinda, remembering his criticism on her estimate.

I hastened to throw oil upon the waters.

“ ’Tis true that William is a plain boy, Belinda, but then he is useful. It is not often that people combine both use and ornament—like you and I. Take Jack for instance, he is ornamental, very, but who could call him useful? ”

Belinda then went on to tell us how she had made up her mind to become a fashion artist. It was—apparently—the easiest thing in the world. All you had to do was to keep your eyes open; go about among well-dressed people, come home, sketch the dresses, add ideas of your own, send them to some ladies’ paper—and there you were!

Belinda had had a passion for dress from her earliest infancy. At six months, so tradition ran, she wore her sash with an air of distinction, and evinced a desire for a shoe



to be put on one foot and a boot on the other, under the impression that it added style to her "tootsies." At twenty she had various dodges known only to herself for making a small allowance go a long way. She would put real flowers in her hat, spreading a little gum on the leaves to give them a false appearance. Even the insects were taken in. There was frequently, to use an old and homely expression, a bee in Belinda's bonnet. Then by judiciously choosing a material that knew its right side from its wrong, and a great deal of sewing, she appeared to have two dresses to her sisters' one.

Belinda's figure was all her own; among us all she alone possessed a standing pose that a soldier might have envied, and movements which were the graceful outcome of slim yet rounded proportions. Mine was somewhat similar, but accentuated, very accentuated; and Olivia's a trifle like it, but elongated, decidedly elongated. But figure



apart, Pamela was the beauty of the family. She had hair the colour of the copper beech's leaves in the young, young days of Spring; and her eyes were like the glimpses of blue sky between its branches. When Pamela was near, we racked our brains for some old dear-loved joke to make her smile, for then we saw the dimple in the upturned chin, and the small white teeth. Pamela never laughed without faintly blushing, and never blushed without smiling as if amused at her own foolishness in letting the swift colour dye her lovely face from brow to chin. She was clever at arranging flowers, and once won a prize at the local flower show, and was quite an adept at making trifles that sell well at bazaars. We hardly liked to ask her what occupation she intended adopting, she looked too young to have decided opinions. But this proved a fallacy when she announced a firm intention of teaching drawing only in a private family. Jack feared it would be a difficult post to get.



“You will probably find,” he said, “that a thorough knowledge of English, conversational French, German, Elementary Latin, calisthenics and dancing must be thrown in as well; and perhaps you’ll have to undertake the harmonium also.”

Pamela and Jack did not always agree. On this occasion she resented his superior information.

“Of course you must put your spoke in,” she said flippantly.

We did not ask William his intentions. They invariably tended toward dry subjects. He had a great facility for figures, had learnt shorthand as a pastime, and found double entry a pleasure. His education, as a whole, had been desultory, run on the lines of never attempting to master any uncongenial subject. The result was somewhat curious: he came out head of the school in mathematics, could place any spot on the globe and give its longitude from memory, and had an idea



that Edward III. and Charles II. were brothers. Belinda said power of concentration was a feature of great minds, and we felt that William would get on. For some few months he had earned a small salary, together with experience, as a clerk to a solicitor in our local town of D——.

So Jack decided to spurn Art and embrace Caricature; Belinda also to spurn Art and embrace Fashions:—some have been known to say these also come under the heading of Caricature. Pamela's hopes, on the other hand, were founded on a School of Art Certificate for Freehand. William had no ideals, and his career promised to be successful but uninteresting.

There only remained Olivia and myself.

I was not as clever as Belinda; I did not know as much as Olivia. They acknowledged it themselves. Until we were more settled, I decided to be the utility member of



the company, to which my relatives graciously agreed.

Around Olivia our hopes of fame centred. She had written poems that had met with encouragement from an author whose criticism she requested, at the same time beseeching his autograph, with many pretty adjectives respecting its value, enclosing a stamped envelope for reply. She did not know where he lived, so she put his name and "London" merely as the address. In after years this circumstance led her to believe that the letter fell into the hands of a mere tyro in literature of the same name as the great man's she had intended it to reach, which accounted for the ready sympathy and generous appreciation of the reply. These same poems were afterward published—gratuitously—in a weekly paper. In the face of so much success, she felt it wrong not to persevere.

In person Olivia was not as pretty as Pamela; her hair was more red than gold, and



her eyes in some lights looked black and in some green. Still she was handsome in her own way. It was a way that included a pocket frequently hanging out of her placquet-hole, and a good many inkspots distributed about her person. William asserted his height as five foot nine, Olivia put hers at five foot seven; that they both looked exactly the same length to the casual observer she attributed to her hair, and her heels—though William was not bald, nor deficient in boot-leather.

Olivia read much, and had ideas. She also had a typewriter, bought second-hand after much self-denial and saving of pocket money, because her handwriting was so illegible that an irate editor once returned her a manuscript simply accompanied by a huge interrogation point which defaced the entire front page.

To learn the typewriter thoroughly she undertook to edit a private magazine and



type the contributions herself. These latter came in—from the few friends who had promised to patronise the venture—so irregularly that more often than not the editress wrote the whole magazine herself, signing each article with a different pseudonym, rather than be behindhand with her literary effort. Those who read the magazine noticed the similarity of style, and concluded that it came from all the articles passing through the same machine.

Olivia had a longing to enter Bohemia and mingle with the great in Literature, Art, and the Drama, so we were not surprised when she said she had no intention of leaving the “Barlock” behind for Uncle Joshua to “play the fool with.” For a person who could compose poetry, Olivia’s conversational prose often struck me as being a little hard.

William, who was very fond of Olivia, offered to teach her shorthand (in the fort-



night that was left to us before leaving The Court) as a set-off to type-writing.

“And you must practise hard at typing, too; forty or fifty words a minute is generally required, and you never got beyond twenty.”

But Olivia hoped to obtain a post as secretary to a poet, for whom speed would be less important. She knew from experience that some words—such as *obnoxious* or *galaxy*—are slow to rhyme.

By the time we had discussed our plans well we grew quite excited at the thought of what lay before us. After all, life would be life in London, whereas in the country it was only existence. I decided to go up to town early one morning, returning the same day, and take rooms from which we could more leisurely seek an unfurnished residence.

It came upon us with quite a shock to remember that we had no furniture. With the exception of the Barlock, Pamela's guitar,



Jack's easel and lay figure, William's bicycle, Belinda's dress stand, my sewing machine, our golf clubs, tennis racquets, cricket bats, and a few trifles, everything in the house was Uncle Joshua's.

Pamela could make pincushions and tea-cosies, whilst Jack had a set of dessert doyleys he had etched for a wedding present. The wedding never came off, and he put them carefully by. Belinda considered these articles—when we enumerated them—insufficient.

“We don't want our new house to look as if had been furnished with things left over from a bazaar!” she cried.

“We must take a furnished house,” said Olivia, “to begin with.”

Had Uncle Joshua been returning a wealthy man, we might have found it incumbent to make some show of appearances; but as he was, if not an actual pauper, at least a person of straitened means, we felt that our



usual mode of life would best fall in with his mood.

The night he arrived, therefore, there was cold ham, scrambled eggs, salad, baked potatoes, and a Dutch cheese for supper.

Uncle Joshua had no appetite.

Together with Mary, our servant for many and many a year, we had made some attempt at tidying the house. Pamela filled every corner with fresh spring flowers, and made a new pincushion for Uncle's room; and Belinda contrived to arrange the furniture so that the hole in the dining-room carpet did not show on first acquaintance.

Olivia cried so much at the prospect of leaving The Court that she was obliged to excuse herself from the supper-table, and only came into the drawing-room when sure that the lamp-shade was arranged to advantage.

After supper, Uncle asked if there was



a train into D—— again that evening. On hearing there was, he hurriedly determined to catch it, begging us not to sit up for him.

William, too, vanished.

A couple of hours passed. We had discussed our relative with much breadth of criticism from every point of view, when William reappeared. Closing the door, he sat down, a broad grin betokening some inward amusement. He too had gone into town unknown to Uncle Joshua, who on reaching D—— Station had gone straight to the nearest hotel and ordered himself a dinner of several courses and a bottle of expensive wine.

“For a poor man,” concluded William, with a sigh, “he has an uncommon relish for delicacies.”

Olivia, hearing the sigh, hurried out of the room with that thoughtfulness she bestowed impartially upon William and herself



to fetch Dutch cheese and a glass of ale. Meanwhile Belinda gave utterance to her disapproval of William's conduct. What right had he to follow Uncle, and, worse still, be seen hanging about the hotel windows? Of course Uncle wouldn't get rid of expensive habits all at once.

"They will drop off by degrees," she said.

"Well, there's no sign of decay at present," responded William.

We agreed to take our departure on the Tuesday following Uncle's arrival. He brought but a small amount of luggage with him; but on the Monday prior to our going, as we came in from paying a farewell call upon some neighbours we found the hall full to overflowing with boxes and cases of every sort, shape, and size.

"It's the rest of your Uncle's luggage, miss," whispered Mary importantly.

Uncle looked rather shamefacedly on.



“Skins and things,” he murmured once, catching Belinda’s eye.

“I see,” replied Belinda politely; “what a good shot you must be!”

“Wouldn’t you like one of the girls to stay behind and help you to unpack?” asked Jack.

But Uncle thought he could manage.

“I must get used to doing things for myself,” he sighed. Poor Uncle!

Olivia and Pamela wept bitterly on the day of departure. They went round the house arm-in-arm, giving little farewell pats to favourite window-seats, and kissed the trees and shrubs in the garden, picking a leaf off each as a keepsake, the result being a bouquet of unwieldy dimensions.

Uncle followed them, looking as if he had something on his mind, but could not put it into words.

Belinda, half resentful, half eager, marched out of the gate with a puppy



under each arm and Jinks at her heels. William came next, bearing miscellaneous articles so many and curious as would have mortified anyone less devoid of the sense of the ridiculous; I, guilty with the knowledge of a few etceteras packed in the family trunk that scarcely came under the heading of our own possessions, brought up the rear with Jack, looking ashamed of the general exodus.

Uncle stood on the front door-step, small and lonely; at least we were together.

“Uncle,” I cried, running back, “mind you send for us if you get ill. I’ve told Mary to order you New Zealand meat, it will save you a lot; and don’t burn candles, oil is so much cheaper.”

Half-way to the station Pamela recollected leaving her umbrella in the schoolroom. Would Jack run back for it? Jack did, and only had time to fling himself into the carriage as the train was moving.



“Joshua was smoking a cigar that cost something, I’d bet,” he said savagely. Jack’s one weakness was tobacco.

For a poor man, Uncle certainly had expensive tastes.



## CHAPTER II.

### IN LONDON TOWN.

THE rooms I had selected on my previous visit to London were in Gower Street. When we arrived the landlady said I had forgotten to tell her beforehand I was bringing five dogs as well as five sisters and brothers. She stood dubiously casting about in her mind whether the animals should be allowed to remain, when Belinda stepped forward and settled the question.

“We must find rooms elsewhere, if you object to the dogs. I thought,” she continued plaintively, “that everyone knew Miss Belinda Chilcott never travelled without her dogs.”

The landlady glanced at the puppies.



They could not as yet walk straight upon four legs, much less two: the notion that we earned a livelihood from canine performances faded from her mind.

Belinda grew a little depressed upon finding the muzzling order in full force in the Metropolis. It entailed buying five muzzles—indeed, more than five; for the puppies not having developed any features worth mentioning, the muzzles came off so frequently in the street that we took sides on the question whether it was less expensive to buy new ones or pay the fine inflicted on unmuzzled owners.

The first evening in London we talked a great deal, more even than usual. Pamela spoke feelingly of the Past, and Olivia discussed the Future; by the tone of her voice she spelt it with a capital F.

Belinda observed that if one looked well after the Present, the Future and the Past, especially the Past, had a way of taking care



of themselves; and Jack asked if we had noticed what a long way off Riverside Court already seemed to be. William put the distance at eighty-five miles; but Jack, it turned out, was speaking of that curious sense of distance which falls upon one on leaving an old familiar pasture for new scenes.

We all wondered—at intervals—what Uncle was doing; and we all looked forward to going to bed, partly because we were tired, partly because it would be such a good opportunity to shed a few quiet tears.

At eleven o'clock we recollected we had not unpacked. William, knowing women took a considerable time in undoing boxes, excused himself and retired, saying if by good chance we came across his pyjamas, would we send them up to him, as it was stiff work sleeping in a starched shirt.

The next morning Jack determined to spend sitting by the window and take notes with his pencil.



“You see, girls,” he explained, “on first coming to a big city like London, points strike you which, after a few months’ residence, you would pass over unnoticed. So I’ll sit here and do a couple of sketches and send them to the *Daily Graphic* on the chance of their being accepted.”

“You might do a series and call them ‘First Impressions of a Country Bumpkin,’ ” suggested I, but Jack did not fall in readily with this hint.

“I’m not a bumpkin,” he said aggrievedly.

Belinda, Olivia, and I went out to look at the shops. Belinda, without taking us into her confidence, all at once entered a smart milliner’s, requesting to be shown some hats. She selected three or four expensive models and directed them to be sent immediately round, giving our address.

“If I keep one, I shall of course, as I am not yet a customer of yours, pay on delivery.”



She laid great stress on the yet and was bowed out with ceremony. She next went to a draper's, where she purchased a straw shape, some flowers and ribbons, and we then returned to our temporary dwelling.

Jack, tempted by the April sunshine, had gone out, leaving his sketch-book on the table.

"Jack is right," observed Olivia critically. "Uncle Joshua's nose is not a point which would strike the resident Londoner in Gower Street."

The hats came shortly after we had got in. Belinda having kindly offered the errand-boy who brought them a chair in the hall and a *Pick-Me-Up* to pass the time, tried them all on, and then selecting the one which pleased her most, placed it in front of her on the table, and with a liberal supply of pins in a few minutes fashioned her own materials on the shape she had bought in excellent imitation of the Paris model. She then re-



packed the hats carefully, and sallied out to the boy.

“Tell Madame Pompon Miss Chilcott is sorry none of them are exactly what she requires. I will call again some day soon.”

“Belinda is——,” said Pamela, with emphasis.

This unfinished saying had become quite a proverb in the family, and expressed much which it would not have done to put in more explicit form.

Belinda came back smiling, and sat down to tot up the price of her new hat on the back of an envelope.

“Seven-and-six, and quite as good”—here, seeing the difference between velvet and velveteen in my eye, she repeated obstinately — “*quite* as good as the two-guinea model.”

As a precaution against overstepping our income, Olivia had divided a small account-book into three divisions, wherein, when she



remembered, she entered the family expenditure. The first division was headed:

“THE NECESSARIES OF LIFE,”

the second—

“THINGS POSSIBLE TO DO WITHOUT,”

and the third—

“SUPERFLUOUS EXTRAVAGANCES.”

Olivia was fond of long words.

Producing this book from her pocket, she turned severely to the third division, and glanced interrogatively at Belinda.

“My hat!” exclaimed that person, cheerfully, trying it on again to see if it would look more *chic* back foremost—“Oh, of course it must go under the necessities of life.”

Olivia objected. “You *could* do without a hat; witness the Bluecoat boys, for instance.”



After some argument it was entered as a thing difficult to do without.

Olivia wished we would remind her always to put down the items, and not take it upon ourselves to interfere.

“Here’s William,” she complained, “has entered the laundress as a superfluous extravagance, and Jack has put down gamboge as a necessity of life!”

Jack had also put down tobacco under “Things Possible to do Without,” the tail of the O trailed away until it ran over the edge of the book. Olivia said it reminded her of a long-drawn sigh, which remark so worked upon Pamela’s feelings that she seized the book and wrote “Vinolia”—the name of a soap to which she was much addicted—in stern characters in the column devoted to chronicling extravagance. Belinda told us how she always found small indulgences economical in the end, they saved her wear and tear of temper.



After lunch we decided to go house-hunting.

“We shall cover a larger area and meet with more results if we divide,” said William.

So we settled to go in two parties—Jack to take Belinda and me, whilst William escorted Olivia and Pamela.

We asked the landlady to give us her opinion on localities.

“London’s a large place,” she observed in answer: after repeating this opinion several times, she advised us to look in a map of the Metropolis and offered to lend us hers.

William’s idea was to cross through all districts we knew to be impossible. It was not until the map was well scored with ink, and Bloomsbury was obliterated by a huge blot, that we remembered it was the landlady’s.

“We shall have to buy a new one now,” grumbled Olivia: “I shall put it down as an



extravagance caused by William's bump of destruction."

After we had rejected Park Lane, and the district round Hyde Park, Harley Street, Eaton Square, and Pall Mall, there still remained considerable choice.

"Westminster must also be scratched through," said Pamela, "because it's sure to be ruinous, the M.Ps. must live near the House."

So Westminster was struck off, also Hammersmith, we could not of course live in Hammersmith. Olivia inclined to Bayswater. She had a notion that it was another name for Bohemia; afterward she discovered that they both began with a B, but there the similarity terminated somewhat abruptly. Finally she, Pamela, and William started for Bayswater.

Jack remained poring over the map. He had heard Sloane Square was very central and convenient.



“Here’s a little unimportant-looking street!” he exclaimed.

We looked where he pointed. It was Cadogan Street. We decided to try it, though I seemed to remember it in connection with Society paragraphs—in which case . . .

However, as the Irishman said, starting saves time even if you go in the wrong direction; and we sallied forth to explore the neighbourhood of Sloane Square.

We took an omnibus and were some time on the road, exactly how long we did not know. Jack had a gold watch and chain; the watch did not go on account of the mainspring being broken, but it looked well. William had a Waterbury, which went excellently but looked—well, it looked just a Waterbury. When he had quarter of an hour to spare he wound it up, if pressed for time one of the girls did it for him. Jack’s watch kept up the



family appearances and William's kept the time.

We changed 'buses three times between Gower Street and Sloane Square. The last one put us down at Cadogan Place. We had sat on the outside, the driver genially pointing out places of interest with his whip as we went by.

"The minit Oi clapt heyes hon yer, I sez, 'Ere's some 'Mericans. 'Mericans they hallus wears them soft 'ats."

Belinda trod on Jack's toe to prevent his patriotism denying this false charge.

"It's better to be considered Americans than country cousins," she whispered; but Jack still looked sick at his artistic hat being thought Yankee.

We wandered about various streets, terraces, and places labelled Cadogan. There did not seem to be any houses to let, so at length we asked a policeman to direct us to an estate agency.



Belinda insisted on going in alone. She had on her new hat, and her brown hair beneath it was arranged in the extreme of fashion. We waited outside.

“I’m not sure, Maria,” said Jack, moodily, “that if you go to work in Belinda’s way, a new hat doesn’t rightly come under the necessities of life.”

When Belinda reappeared she related how she had first asked if there were any flats to let in the neighbourhood, from flats she got on to houses. One of the latter had been let, the agent said, that morning, at four hundred pounds per annum. Belinda found this vexatious, as it seemed, by description, to be just what she required. The interview concluded by the agent promising to send a list of any houses he thought suitable.

“It’s my opinion,” said I, “that we shall have to live in the suburbs.”

“Of course,” continued Belinda, “I knew



from the look of these houses the rents would be enormous."

"Then why did you go on making enquiries?" queried Jack morosely.

"I might be able to take one some day," answered Belinda.

We received this information with silent contempt. Who was Belinda that she should—and could—imagine herself in Cado-gan Place, whilst we meditated upon the advantages of the suburbs?

After some tea in an aërated bread shop, we retraced our way slowly to Gower Street. It was six o'clock before we got in, finding the others had arrived before us.

At first they had wondered that Bayswater was so little known, for the omnibus conductor on being told to put them down there kept on repeating "Where?"

"It subsequently transpired," said Olivia, "that he meant where *in* Bayswater?"

William, whose survey of the map had left



a complete impression on his mind, mentioned the Queen's Road as their desired destination. On passing a house agent's he had entered, and, with that total contempt for appearances which was ever his peculiarity, asked for particulars of the cheapest house on the books.

The clerk replied he had nothing under fifty pounds a year, and that could only by courtesy be termed Bayswater.

"You won't get what you want, sir, outside the suburbs."

"Then I should be so glad," went on William, "if you would give me a few hints as to the suburbs most pleasant to live in. I am" (here he glanced affectionately at Pamela) "soon going to be married."

The clerk was young; he grew sympathetic and confidential, telling them how he, too, soon hoped to be married and set up his domestic tent in some suburban Arcadia.



The amount of information he delivered in a short space of time was amazing.

Feeling that William had a real talent for house-hunting, we accepted his offer to be the pioneer in this affair.

“And I will go alone, too,” he went on, “it will be cheaper: why, just we three going about to-day made such a hole in two bob, that what change there was dropped through and got lost for ever.”

“Oh! go alone, by all means,” we cried, “and when you find anything suitable we’ll go in a body and criticise it.”

Then somebody suggested it was a pity to waste the evening, could we not manage a theatre? So we hurried over supper and started. Some inclined to the Lyceum, but William said that the agent’s clerk when discussing the merits of no basements compared to areas had mentioned what an exceedingly enjoyable play was “Charley’s Aunt.”



“It will do Pamela good to have a laugh,” finished our considerate brother.

Although it was past midnight when we returned, Olivia hunted up the account-book of expenditure. She ruled the inside of the cover and entered, “*Charley’s Aunt,*” *six seats thirty shillings.*

“It seemed to require a new heading,” she said, closing the book, “so I have put it under EDUCATIONAL.”



## CHAPTER III.

### WE BECOME HOUSEHOLDERS.

So it was owing to William that we became the tenants of Number 3 Triangle Lawn, Brick Park, S.W.

After he had explored some eight suburbs and inspected between fifty and sixty houses, he grew quite opinionated on the subject of suburban dwellings, and declared that we never could, never should, get a house to suit us better than the one at Brick Park. On condition that we did all the necessary repairs at our own expense, the landlord took five pounds off the rent, which brought it down to thirty-five. It was not a bad little house. Its exterior was neat and quasi-rural, with creepers covering red brick and wooden windows.



The rooms, if small, were numerous and airy; the details of rates, taxes, soil, and drains appeared satisfactory—only, well, we were a little vexed with William in that he had forgotten to keep in mind those points for which we had especially stipulated.

Jack had begged him to remember that a north light is as essential to an artist as his india-rubber. No. 3 faced due east and west. William, in excuse, said he had always understood that dawn and sunset were favourite effects with artists. Jack said: "William's all right, but he's so silly!"

Belinda, too, was irritated, which with her meant irritable as well. The ends of two boroughs met on the triangular green lawn which gave our road its name; the muzzling order was in force in one borough, and not in the other. It was obvious to everyone except William that we should have taken No. 33 instead of No. 3, where the puppies could have played about the road unmuzzled.



Belinda did not take into account that No. 33 was so near the railway line that its last occupants had left, saying they had rented a railway-station unawares.

Pamela, too, cried when she discovered there were no bow-windows, but cheered up a little when Olivia pointed out the possibilities of four cosy corners in the drawing-room.

I was content; a box-room large enough for three boxes, and two cupboards on the stairs, so far surpassed my expectations. So too was Olivia, who openly acknowledged her liking for the house, at which the discontented ones hinted at the immediate neighbourhood of a Free Library as a motive for this partiality.

We had at first entertained some idea of furnishing on the hire system; but on interviewing the furniture to be paid for by instalments, we decided that though the system might be the hire, our spirits would certainly be the lower for having those artistic tend-



encies before mentioned brought in daily contact with such jarring ugliness.

“We must pick up things at sales,” said Olivia, vaguely; “and at curio-shops, I believe, bric-à-brac and old oak can be got for a mere song.”

William objected to picking up his bed at a sale.

“I might,” he said, “get more than I bargained for.”

William was not over-refined.

Ultimately we sold out a small sum of capital, determining to make it sufficient to cover the adornment of our new house.

Pamela wrote to the editress of a column devoted to hints on house-furnishing in a lady's paper. After we had spent all we had to spend and a few sixpences beside in buying the paper each week, the answer appeared. It declared that Pamela had forgotten to comply with most of the rules for correspondents, and hinted that she would not



be replied to again unless she conformed to the etiquette of the column. She had also omitted to state how many rooms her house contained, and what sum she contemplated lavishing on its decoration. If she would write these details, clearly and fully, stating her favourite colours and styles of furnishing, she should be answered at length. Meanwhile she was not to purchase anything in a hurry.

We left Gower Street early on the morning of the day we were to take possession of the house. A charwoman, who had been sent by the landlord to clean the house, admitted us. We engaged her to come every day until we were more settled, when we should write for Mary, who had promised to follow us.

The porters when they brought our luggage seemed a little surprised to leave it in a totally empty house. Belinda, as she gave them a liberal tip, asked them if they had no-



ticed a large Whiteley's van on the road. When they replied in the negative, her attention had wandered and she forgot to look surprised.

The greater part of that morning we spent in criticising the house and apportioning the rooms. The furniture—that small amount we had bought as a start-off whilst we looked round to choose more at leisure—arrived in dribblets. The beds came first; they were all alike, with mattresses and bolsters and one blanket each. When purchasing these it had struck me forcibly how even a little figure like one when multiplied by six has a way of mounting up into unexpected totals.

The dining-room suite followed. We had bought it at a bureau often advertised, where people send their superfluous household goods to be sold for a charity. After some experience of the chairs we unanimously agreed that whatever cause the charity was



to benefit, no advantage was supposed to accrue to the purchasers.

It was afternoon before the crockery appeared. It came at last, and our spirits rose on perceiving what a finishing touch a jug and basin give to a bedroom, especially when placed on the floor. The boys went out with a list to buy provisions and insist upon coals being delivered that evening, and we proceeded to unpack our trunks and discuss the situation.

I was surprised at the thoughtfulness the girls had displayed in recollecting to bring trifles which would not be missed by Uncle Joshua and which were endeared to us by useful association. Thus, Belinda, after much diving head-foremost in her dress-basket, fished up half a dozen silver teaspoons swathed in an old glove and inserted in a shoe.

“You see, Maria,” she said, apologetically, “it looks so bad not to have any silver,



and I left Uncle Joshua the other half-dozen. Even if he had a tea-party—which isn't likely—he wouldn't use more than half a dozen."

On going into Olivia's room I found her seated on the floor diligently polishing something in her hand. By some curious coincidence it appeared that the idea of tea-spoons had also occurred to her.

"I should have brought seven, as one is sure to get lost; but I could not find the other six. You recollect, Maria, we only had a dozen."

I explained how it had come about that the seventh was missing and went back to Belinda, who on hearing how perversely things had fallen out complained resentfully of Olivia's want of confidence.

"Six forks now would have come in so very conveniently."

Compared with this matter of the tea-spoons, the dozen sheets and few tablecloths



I had stowed in my box sank into insignificance.

Pamela's one idea had been not to part with a certain old blue Delft jar to which she was much attached and which now beamed familiarly upon us from an uncarpeted floor. To prevent its breaking, Mary, who had helped us to pack, had filled it with a few little odds and ends that came handy, a small carriage-clock, two inkstands, and a pen-tray, wrapped up in dusters. When William's eye fell on these familiar objects arranged to much advantage on a mantel-shelf, he observed that it was rough on Joshua, and applied such unpleasant adjectives to the matter of the tea-spoons that Olivia, conscience-stricken, packed up the half-dozen she had brought, and posted them to Mary with strict instructions that they all six were to be placed in the most conspicuous positions on the breakfast-table directly they arrived.

The next morning Belinda asked Olivia,



who still controlled the expenditure, if she thought the purchase of an eider-down quilt could be fairly called a superfluous extravagance. Olivia, in reply, pointed out that we were in April, and as the summer was coming on she was afraid it would come under that heading; to which Belinda made answer that—unless something unusual occurred—the summer would inevitably be followed by the winter. This Olivia could not deny. She was sitting meditating upon the question, when Jack came down looking cross. He did not say “good-morning,” but commenced the day by telling us he hardly felt as if he had been to bed at all; there was so little difference to his mind between sleeping under his clothes and in them. Finally Belinda took the law into her own hands and wrote to Mary, telling her to bring some blankets from The Court and join us at the end of the week. If Uncle Joshua—so her letter ran—happened to pass as she was packing the



blankets, Mary might say he could see for himself how necessary it was for them to go to the cleaners to have the moth exterminated; if, however, he happened to be out or otherwise engaged, she was not on any account to bother him about them.

A day or two afterward the blankets arrived alone, with a note pinned on the topmost:

“ My dear young ladies and Marster William—You may be s’prised to see blankets come without Mary. Marster Uncle Joshua came into the kitchen as I was cording the box. I told him as how I were sending a few boots and things by the young ladies direction as Marster William had some idee of going suspectin a diamond mine in Canady. Marster Joshua made no coment. He says as Im not to leave here on no account. I replide I shood keep to my original promise of taking service with the first of the young la-



dies as got married. And which will that be Mary says he, I said as how it woodn't be becoming in me to mention no names but I didn't suppose as how it wood be Miss Maria, Miss Blinda, nor Miss Livia. Marster Uncle Joshua has rased my wages and pays me regular, things is much changed from what they was, and I'm on no account to menshun rise.

"Now dear young ladies hoping this will find you better than it leves me having the neuralgic cruel from washing in the open,

"I am your obed.

"MARY JAMES.

"P.S.—I have put a cake for Miss Pamela among the blankets."

We felt indignant with Mary. She had been basely bought over by "Marster Uncle Joshua." Only Pamela smiled dreamily as she read the letter a second time, and then went upstairs to do her hair in a new fashion.

William declared it was as well that Mary



hadn't come, for the neighbourhood had a reputation for propriety and might have objected to her "washing in the open." Belinda held that this washing referred to the cleansing of dusters, tea-cloths, etc., and there was a good deal of argument as to whether our late handmaiden had deteriorated.

"Not in her cooking at any rate!" cried Olivia between bites of a large piece of the cake.

Belinda acknowledged the arrival of the blankets coldly on a postcard:

"The Misses Chilcott have received blankets sent by their direction by Mary James."

That was all. After the card was posted we recollected all the letters went to The Court in a locked bag, which would of course be opened by Uncle Joshua. We consoled ourselves by reflecting that he couldn't say much about the matter, as that would be ad-



mitting he had read another person's postcard.

Olivia's plan of picking up furniture at sales answered very well. There was a large sale-room within a stone's-throw of Triangle Lawn, and one or other of us patronised all the auctions that took place there at short intervals. There was some bitterness as to whose were the greatest bargains. On one occasion William was much pleased with himself that on bidding for a kitchen table it was knocked down to him at a few shillings, with a knife-grinder and a housemaid's box thrown in. Belinda maintained that we really extracted more use from the sideboard which had been her bargain, though William pooh-poohed the sideboard on the score that it had been accompanied by a dozen glass globes which could not by any persuasion be made to fit any burner in the house.

Jack, nervous of infection, bought a tin of Sanitas powder and well peppered the bar-



gains as they were brought into the house. Jinks took this as personal, and sulked for some days. It is not to be denied that to a dog of fine feelings but limited comprehension, between Keating's Insect Powder and Sanitas, a mere disinfectant, there may be a distinction but no obvious difference.

When we bought anything which on more mature consideration did not seem worth its money, or refused to adjust itself to the place where it was required to go, we simply returned it to the sale-room, requesting the broker to put it in the next sale and credit us with the amount fetched.

Belinda grew quite friendly with the auctioneer. She explained to him that he did not give her time to change her mind. After this, when she made a bid, he paused before bringing down the hammer, to see if she would retract.

It was kind of him, and as she generally did not wish to retract, the plan answered



admirably, till one day he paused too long, and someone bid considerably higher than Belinda, who thus lost an armchair she was particularly desirous of possessing.

As a result of furnishing chiefly from sales, we had nine coal-scuttles, five knife-boards, and six butlers' trays. We did not want them exactly—they just happened to be comprised in lots which contained something we really required. Sales are a cheap way of getting a superfluity of one article.

At the curio shops we were not so fortunate. The bric-à-brac and old oak which we had heard were to be had for a mere song were conspicuous by their absence.

“The song,” sighed Belinda, “has evidently been sung before our day.”

The Barlock came in useful at this juncture.

Olivia went daily to the Free Library with pencil and note-book, and copied any advertisements from the papers which prom-



ised employment and replied to them on the typewriter, signing the letters with the name of the one she considered best fitted to fill the needed requirements.

One day she came back full of hope for Jack. In the *Daily News* she had met with a request for a young gentleman of energy and talent to develop an artistic undertaking. The reply to her letter was not quite what we expected. The artistic undertaking that needed development was a company to float a new enamel on the market. To prove how *bonâ fide* was this undertaking, the Company sent a sample box of twelve small pots of enamel and a dozen brushes.

Jack on reading the paper sighed and exclaimed, "*Ars longa vita brevis*," and walked majestically from the room.

Pamela requested William to explain the phrase Jack had quoted, but William, whose educational plan had not embraced Latin,



could only hazard that Art was long-suffering.

Olivia reproved this free translation.

“No, no, William,” she said, “it means ‘Art is long, Vice is short.’”

Pamela was still dissatisfied; she followed Jack to his painting-room, and returned triumphant.

“It means,” she cried, “‘Art is long, but not wide enough to take in enamel!’”

Then Olivia said:

“I told you so!”

Belinda, who was never satisfied, wished the Company had sent more of one colour, as she could then have enamelled each of the drawing chairs the same shade.

After this, William took to writing his own business letters, with the result that he obtained a clerkship to a member of the Stock Exchange, at a salary of twenty-five shillings a week.

One morning the charwoman sent round



to say she could not come for a few days, owing to an outbreak of measles in her family. Olivia, on her way to the Library, promised to call in at a registry-office and make inquiries after a "general." I did the cooking.

That evening Olivia startled us all by suddenly declaring she was disappointed in London.

"It gives me a vague yearning," she explained pathetically. "I feel as if I wanted something, but don't quite know what."

William broke the awed silence which followed this outburst:

"I've had that feeling myself, though it was in the country, and if my memory serves me, it was on a day when Maria had done the cooking."

I felt glad that Jack had always been my favourite brother, and mentioned the fact aloud.

Pamela picked up her guitar and began



to sing, under the impression that it would restore the general harmony of the evening, but Jack begged her to desist.

“Your voice, my dear girl, trickles about my back and runs out of the holes in my socks.”

“Brothers are——” protested Pamela, fretfully.

“Yes,” rejoined William, “as you say, ‘brothers are’ is the plural to ‘Belinda is.’”

“I’m not——,” began Pamela, when she was interrupted by a loud knock on the door. Olivia ran to open it.

“Why, it’s Mary!” she cried.

Mary it was. She had been so exercised in her feelings by Belinda’s postcard, that she had deluded “Master Uncle Joshua” into believing in the sickness of an imaginary mother.

“Though I be an orphan, as Master William knows,” concluded Mary.

This did not infer that William had any



complicity in the death of her parents; but simply that he was acquainted with the fact that they were no more. We explained to Mary how the charwoman had left us stranded, whereupon she remarked that, as far as she was concerned, the charwoman could stay with the measles and welcome; for, judging by the appearance of things in general, she wasn't much of a muchness.

Not a word would Mary say concerning Uncle Joshua. To all our queries she answered that things were much as they were excepting where they had altered, that she had been "so homesick for Miss Pamela" she could not stay away from her any longer.

The box ottoman, which had been my bargain, now came in useful as an additional bed. Under Mary's hearty admiration of our furnishing, our spirits, latterly a trifle depressed, rose to their usual high level. But we could not persuade her to give a definite opinion as to whether William or Belinda



had most contributed to the utility of the establishment.

To William she said: "Miss B'linda was always fond of a little show, not but what a sideboard comes in 'andy in a dining-room."

And to Belinda she said: "How should a young gentleman of Master William's education be 'spected to know as a 'ousemaid as is a 'ousemaid can get along without a box!"



## CHAPTER IV.

### CONCERNING ART AND LITERATURE.

WHEN Belinda had several sheets of fashion-drawings ready she intimated her intention of taking them round to show the editors of some dozen papers.

We wondered whence she gathered her ideas on dress, for the inhabitants of Brick Park admirably fulfilled what some have laid down as a test of a well-dressed woman—that on beholding her once, you do not feel constrained to look again. I had a notion that the Smith's boy at the station bookstall could have enlightened us, for Belinda spent many half-hours conversing with him whilst she turned over the fashion numbers in search of ideas, and occasionally—very occasionally—bought a copy of *Woman*.



The first week, in going the round of Fleet Street and its environs, Belinda spent ten shillings in 'bus and train fares, and sold one drawing, for which she received five. She wore her oldest garments, wishing to keep a new cape she had contrived out of the pink shot inside of an old mackintosh for more pleasurable occasions, until one fine June day, vanity overcoming economy, she sallied forth arrayed in everything smart of her own, with the addition of what she could borrow. On returning from town, she hinted casually that in future she should always wear her best clothes when occupied with the disposal of her sketches. Even so short an experience had taught her that in London if you look dowdy people treat you with respect, but evince little or no interest in your career; whereas a smart appearance meets with a certain measure of success, though, apparently, it also entails some doubts as to respectability.



Having only thirty-three pounds six and eightpence annually she could call her own, and a promised share in William's future prosperity, was it not absolutely necessary to look over the fact that editors, and especially sub-editors, fancied she called on them less to dispose of her wares than to have a little genial conversation? After some few rebuffs, notwithstanding that she invariably represented each office she entered as being the one that edited the only paper for which she would care to work—the only paper, in fact, that was all a paper should be—she fell in with a new organ, whose editor engaged her to illustrate the column devoted to the latest style in underclothing, which he delicately termed *lingerie*.

It had not been exactly Belinda's ambition to sit up to late hours of the night reproducing the newest things in camisoles, but she was always one of those who find it easier to cut according to their cloth than try to



obtain a wider material. Her method of procedure was to go, by editorial direction, to certain fashionable shops and sketch their novelties. From that date Belinda never had to buy any gloves, stockings, or fans. Pamela openly wished she had taken up fashion-drawing; but Jack was heard to murmur something about bribery and corruption, unheeding our assurance that other arts beside the culinary one had their "perquisites."

Jack's ideas did not adapt themselves so readily to circumstances as Belinda's. For some weeks he wore out boot-leather and his temper in equal proportions carrying round sketches of ancient cathedrals and ruined castles, when one day by mistake he included in his portfolio a little pen-and-ink drawing he had made from life, on an evening when Mary had come up suddenly to the painting-room where we were sitting to say a "gentleman had called to see Miss Belinda." The sketch represented Belinda grasping a pair



of black satin cycling knickerbockers, of the latest mode, and expostulating with the “gentleman,” who had come down from a fashionable ladies’ tailor to say that the supply could not keep pace with the demand, and that the pair carried off by Miss Chilcott for sketching purposes were urgently needed, so greatly had they taken the popular taste.

An editor chanced upon this drawing and was much struck with its humorous simplicity; he had a joke pigeon-holed which would suit it exactly, it was topical and had that slight suspicion of vulgarity without which the wit of the day is unpalatable to the multitude and only fit for *Punch*. Would Jack send him similar sketches? If so, there should be a corner kept every week for his work, or as often as he could send it.

Belinda urged Jack to take this opening.

“Beggars, dear boy,” she said, “must never be choosers. I have watched the evolution of that paper with interest—it began,



you remember, with the gaiters of the Church, it is now chiefly devoted to the legs of the ballet."

William added his shred of information. He had heard that the shares—for the paper was run by a company—had gone up from two and a half to five. Regarding legs from a financial point of view, he had found it interesting to note what a difference mere gender made in their value as an investment. Jack's dislike to using his pencil in the cause of popular vulgarity being thus overruled, he began to get on better. His editor was somewhat erratic in the matter of payments: when self-respect at intervals demanded discontinuance of contributions until a cheque arrived, Jack turned the time thus gained to account by studying Posters, which drew from William the observation that Art reminded him of a certain place of entertainment much advertised under the heading—

"All roads lead to Earl's Court."



It was unfortunate for Belinda that, just as she was entering into the spirit of her work, the puppies should all fall ill of the mange. Her editor wrote reproachfully to say her drawings had not arrived that week until after the paper had gone to press. In return she confided with a pretty apology the distressing sickness of her canine friends, but when the same tardiness occurred the following week the editor wrote again more peremptorily. He was sorry the puppies had the mange; but fashions changed so rapidly that if the page devoted to *lingerie* was a week behind, it gave the whole paper the air of being a back number. He inferred facetiously that as long as Miss Chilcott's drawings were up to time, the puppies might go to the dogs.

Belinda tore up this letter, much to the chagrin of Olivia, who suspected an autograph in every communication.

Only one of the puppies died. Its mistress wished to have it buried in the garden,



but on this point I was firm. Had it only been a flower garden I should not have minded; but tomatoes, onions, and the where-withal to make salad grew beneath the shade of hollyhocks and nasturtiums. We referred the matter in dispute to William the night the puppy died. He decided that a sixth portion of the garden was rightly under the tenancy of Belinda; if she chose to use it as a cemetery, she of course could. For his own part, he had been vexed when the landlord mentioned that our predecessor in the house had been very partial to animals and also unfortunate in losing several.

“To the loss of his live stock,” commented William in conclusion, “I attribute wholly and solely the fact that the vegetable-marrow I planted in the farthest corner of the garden shows unmistakable signs of growing into the dining-room.”

Before this discussion we had freely indulged a forgivable weakness for marrows,



but after it they would have gone to seed had not Mary devised a plan for exchanging them for potatoes with the owner of a vegetable cart when he called for orders.

Olivia's good memory put an end to the perplexity concerning the puppy's burial-place. She recalled having read a description of a spot in London where dogs may be decently buried and their bones let lie in peace, and succeeded in getting the magazine in which the article had appeared, for us to read further particulars. The dogs' cemetery turned out to be, of all places in the world, in Hyde Park, a lodge-keeper's garden being appropriated for this humane purpose. Belinda herself went to choose the exact site of the grave, and ascertained that the funeral could take place on the morrow. We spent the evening in considering a suitable epitaph to be engraved on the puppy's tombstone. William was anxious to know how we intended to get the body to the cemetery—were we



going to send it by Carter Paterson & Co., or how? He hoped he was not officious in reminding us that the Post-Office regulations relating to dead cats applied equally to dead dogs.

Given time for consideration, it was always possible to forecast what William would say on any subject; but though his remarks were obvious to a degree, indeed he was a sympathetic and unselfish lad. That evening he stayed up late to construct a coffin out of a Sunlight soap-box, in which he laid the puppy, nailing it down and covering it with a bit of green baize, and addressing it neatly to Belinda. Pamela grieved that no flowers had been placed on the poor little puppy, and would have opened the coffin to repair this omission had we allowed her.

At ten in the morning we started for the funeral, Mary coming as far as the station, and handing the baize-covered box into the carriage in respectful silence. The coffin be-



ing rather heavy as well as noticeable, on alighting at the Queen's Road station, Belinda as chief mourner stepped into a hansom. Olivia, Pamela, and I followed in an omnibus. At Victoria Gate we got out, to find Belinda standing on the kerb beside the remains, looking rather flustered. It appeared the hansom driver had been annoyed on discovering her destination, and had said, in tones more loud than polite, had he guessed she was making a "bloomin' 'earse of 'is keb," he would have refused to drive her.

"And I gave him an extra sixpence, too, in case it was illegal to drive a dead dog," concluded his fare wrathfully.

When the ceremony was over and the puppy laid to sleep among the never-ceasing rumble of London traffic, far, far from the country home where his short days had been mostly spent, we called at a monumental mason to order the tombstone. Whilst Be-



linda discussed details of stone and shape with the mason, Olivia somewhat spitefully drew our attention to the fact that Belinda could not forget herself even on a tombstone:

“She’s getting in her own name on it as well as the puppy’s.”

When we got back, Mary informed us laconically that “The Church had called” during our absence. A card, inscribed “The Rev. Theophilus Kittiwake, The Vicarage, Brick Park, S.W.,” lay on the hall table, also bearing testimony to our first visitor.

“I told the gentleman,” continued Mary, “that you young ladies wasn’t in, that you had gone to a funeral; and ’twasn’t no use my going upstairs to tell Master Jack, as he’d be sure to say as he wasn’t at home.”

We regretted having been out. Olivia was able to describe Mr. Kittiwake in appearance, as she had noticed him going to and fro in the parish.



“He is tall and dark, with brown curly hair, rather handsome, but walks badly.”

I looked at the card several times. Kittiwake was not a name one would choose to carry one through life; still, I did not entirely agree with the others, who declared it reminded them of a missing word competition.

About this time Pamela, having met with no success in her endeavours to teach drawing only in a private family, decided to go on the Stage.

She ordered the *Era* to come in with the *Church Times*. It was the latter paper which influenced Olivia's career. One week, sandwiched in between the details of twelve surplices to be sold for the benefit of a new organ fund, and the offer of a “warm, comfortable home at reduced terms” to any elderly gentleman whose accomplishments included carving, she saw an advertisement which promised to fling open the gates of Bohemia.



It emanated from an author who required a young lady secretary about twenty-two, knowledge of typing essential, her own typewriter a recommendation. She must be of good appearance, and able to correct proofs carefully. Intending applicants were requested in the first instance to write to address given, when a personal interview might be arranged. The fact that the author had inserted the word "married" in brackets after stating his profession, coupled with the announcement appearing in the *Church Times*, made us doubt his atmosphere being as purely Bohemian as one could have wished.

Olivia, replying to this advertisement, enlarged upon the fact that her typewriter was her own.

"I need not say I got it second-hand," she exclaimed, as with shining eyes she sat nibbling her pen trying to recall points in her own favour. "Neither shall I mention my



exact age. If I put I shall be twenty soon, that will look better than saying I'm only eighteen."

With regard to her personal appearance, she modestly left the author to judge for himself from the photograph she enclosed, only remarking she had altered considerably—a necessary statement, seeing that the photo was not her own, which she had mislaid, but Pamela's.

The author answered by return of post, appointing a personal interview at his house, but a few miles distant. When Pamela, looking over her sister's shoulder, saw that the letter was not signed "Walter Besant" her interest died down suddenly.

The author had thoughtfully sent a printed slip containing the names and publishers of his books, to help in identifying him. This enabled Olivia to obtain one or two and read them; she also looked him up in *Who's Who*, which shed a light on his Univer-



sity and literary career. She deduced—chiefly from the titles of his works—that he was a poet as well as a prose writer, and her interest redoubled, and we spoke of him from that day, when we spent a whole afternoon admiring his signature—a particularly bold one—as “The Poet.”

When later on in the week Olivia returned from the personal interview, we were intensely interested to hear what had passed. The Poet, we learnt, was not of the Byronic type; he had a genial, even cheerful manner, and was handsome in an erect, white-moustachioed, soldierly way. Altogether he appeared to be one of the exceeding few who see their own surroundings through rose-coloured glasses.

“I’m not quite clear,” continued Olivia, “what the secretary’s duties are; but they seem to include generally enjoying Bohemia. He showed much sympathy on hearing I contributed to the *Animal World*, though it



is not a paper he has himself worked for. I was just going to ask him upon what book he is now engaged, when the tea came in and he pressed me to take some bread and butter. I only blushed five times—not bad, was it?”

Five blushes in a quarter of an hour was moderate for Olivia.

The Poet had had about two hundred applications, but promised to think over Olivia and let her know the result.

The result was a summons to take up her residence in Bohemia, and not on any account to forget the typewriter.

“He seems to think it’s of as much importance as I am!” cried the owner of the machine, vexedly.

With Belinda’s help she made some pretty additions to her wardrobe and bought herself a pair of spectacles—not that she required them, but considered them essential to a literary appearance—and thus equipped set sail for that happy land, Bohemia.



## CHAPTER V.

### CONCERNING A FIRST ACQUAINTANCE.

SOME time after the events to be here related, I explained to the Rev. Theophilus Kit-tiwake that if on the occasion of his first parochial call he went away under the impression that William was a member of the Stock Exchange, that Jack was painting a picture for next year's Academy, and Olivia away on a visit of pleasure, it was not due to my share in the conversation.

And the Vicar, with that wide charity for which he was remarkable, said: "*Belinda is just a trifle inaccurate.*"

The grin which accompanied these words was nearly as wide as the charity.

We had just come in from seeing Olivia



off by train to Bohemia. The realisation of her dreams took off the keen edge of parting, and if there was a tear in her eye it arose more from having attracted a wandering particle of coal-dust, than sorrowing affection. But we were commenting a trifle dolefully on the first break in our circle, when the Vicar was shown in. I observed a tall man, with brown crinkly hair, dark eyes, and a sympathetic manner. Belinda noticed that he wore his nose a trifle to one side and used his soft hat to punctuate his conversation.

“I was unfortunate in finding you out on my first call. Your servant said you had gone to a funeral. I hope” (here his eye roved from my pink blouse to the blue ribbon of Belinda’s hat) “that as you are not in mourning you have not lost any near relative?”

“No—no relation—a friend only,” murmured Belinda, absently. “Died of the mange.”



“Well, hardly a friend,” I hastened to explain; “that is—a puppy; we buried him in Hyde Park.”

“The dog is the friend of man,” responded the Vicar genially.

After he had gone, Belinda said his conversation reminded her of last year’s fashions.

Belinda poured out tea, and beamed behind the tea-cosy. She had a way of smiling at the end of her sentences that made strangers feel as if she had confided something to them of first-class importance.

“Maria and I,” she observed, passing him a cup with the grace of a complete understanding, “never take milk or sugar in our tea.”

Then she smiled, and Mr. Kittiwake said “Indeed!” and felt as if he had known her for years, perhaps christened her.

Aware that my sister never did anything without a motive, I meekly accepted my tea



brown and bitter, though I liked sugar and cream better than most people. Presently the motive became apparent, when the Vicar refusing a second cup, Belinda poured what remained of the cream—there had only been a few spoonfuls, the milkman having unaccountably forgotten us—and added liberally of sugar. Though so good at adapting herself to circumstances, Belinda invariably forgot to carry them through consistently.

A little general and parochial discussion followed, and then the Vicar mentioned there was a pew in his church vacant; if we liked to secure it, its rent was two guineas. It was the only one likely to be available for some time; he regretted it was situated somewhat low down in the church, in a draughty position. Belinda intimated that she took cold easily, and the matter ended by our accepting the loan of the Vicarage pew—gratis—until one out of the way of draughts became vacant. William, when we notified this ar-



rangement, found fault with the usual selfishness of women.

“How,” he demanded, “am I, right under the pulpit, to get the forty winks to which I am accustomed during the sermon?”

“Your doze, William,” replied I, “when weighed in the balance against two pounds pew-rent, proves you a very light sleeper.”

Having settled about the pew, the Vicar went on to tell us there was to be a tea given in the Parish school-room, a sort of anniversary ceremony to celebrate his having been a year in the parish. He hoped we should find time to come to it. The churchwardens had insisted upon his taking the opportunity thus afforded for mentioning a certain deficiency in the offertory for Church expenses.

“Would you advise me,” he asked, looking much perplexed, “to mention this before the tea or after?”

I suggested after. “It would be a pity to spoil people’s appetites.”



Belinda considered parish appetites not easily daunted, and that to mention it afterward might give them indigestion.

“I much prefer making these announcements from the pulpit,” sighed the Vicar.

“Where there’s no likelihood of your being contradicted,” we agreed sympathetically.

Then the talk turned upon a “Jumble” Sale to take place on the following Thursday. Belinda was much interested in hearing how it was managed, and begged to be allowed to send a few contributions.

“Things do accumulate so—don’t they?” she remarked, forgetting we had only been in the house a month or so.

“For a first call,” said I, looking at the clock, “an hour and a half is not a bad allowance.”

Belinda stood near the window watching the Vicar stride across the green to the Vicarage.



“He’s weak about the knees, that’s what makes him walk so badly. I noticed that though he talked most to me, he looked a good deal at you, Maria.”

We consulted Mary as to what we could spare for the “Jumble” Sale. She hinted that the gas globes which had accompanied the sideboard were not needed.

“And a different butler’s tray for every day of the week being what Miss ’Livia calls an extravagant possibility, you might send at least three of them, Miss Maria.”

So without giving away anything we should have missed, we had more space and convenience in the house after our donations for the good of the parish. The Vicar told me afterward—when there was no longer any need to live up to strained notions of politeness—that he concluded we had bought up an entire “Jumble” Sale from somewhere to furnish with.

My artistic tendencies, which had hitherto



found outlet in useful but plain sewing, suddenly developed in the direction of ecclesiastical embroidery. Belinda, not to be outdone in her esteem for the Vicar, presented him with two of the puppies and offered the third to be raffled at a forthcoming bazaar. Indeed, I sometimes considered that she took too warm an interest in church matters. One evening, for instance, when brushing her hair, always a credit to the amount of attention she paid it, she confided how she had—  
anonymously—sent a P.O. for half-a-crown toward the deficiency in the offertory for church expenses. This deficiency, though it fluctuated in amount, was chronic in substance. That week it must have reached its high-water mark, for the day before, after evening service, I had slipped a florin into the box dedicated to contributions just inside the church door. It was not necessary to tell Belinda this, indeed I reproved her severely.



“Charity should begin at home—even in these days of cheap travelling.”

Belinda, combing her hair over her face and peering through it until Jinks, allowed to watch the operation, mistook her for his first cousin, retorted that she had not understood the violet stole I was working was for home decoration.

“I suppose, Maria, you intend it for a mantle-border.”

There was no reasoning with Belinda.

As the summer grew on, Uncle Joshua conceived the useful idea of sending us a weekly hamper. It was kind of him. Sometimes we wrote and told him so, sometimes we forgot even to acknowledge it. Once I remember we had reason to point out that it might have been better packed.

“We have not”—so ran our letter—“yet been able to determine whether the contents of last week’s hamper were fruit



or jam, it came in so mashed a condition."

Uncle wrote apologetically in reply, saying he had packed it himself, the gardener being busy. We interrogated Mary as to whether a gardener had been installed at The Court before her departure.

She said: "I believe, Miss, as there was a person as called himself such, but I didn't take no great heed to him."

Uncle's ideas on hampers, though mainly composed of fruit and vegetables, included filling the corners up with packets of tea, sugar, and coffee, and at the bottom more often than not we discovered a ham of excellent flavour. Once only he mentioned Mary; as some weeks had elapsed since her departure to nurse her mother, he supposed there were some wages due to her: she had left intending to return. He enclosed the cheque, trusting that we knew her address and would forward it. The cheque was for



five pounds, which put Mary's wages at about twenty-five pounds a year. We asked her if she honestly considered herself worth that sum, and agreed to abide by her decision. After meditating silently upon her own value, she suggested that as "Master William" got up early to clean the windows, and laid the supper on "her night out," the sum should be divided between them.

When we handed the half to William he remarked that it was the very first time in his life he had not found virtue to be its own—and only—reward, and modestly questioned whether he had a right to spend it entirely as he desired. We assured him he had, and he went out there and then and purchased a lawn mower, explaining in extenuation of his purchase that—

"You would hardly believe the time it takes getting round the lawn, small as it is, with only Maria's scissors."



Jack did not approve of Pamela's plan of going on the Stage. He would put his foot down on it.

"Seeing that you take a nine," said Belinda, "your method, Jack, should be effective."

Pamela did not care what Jack thought. William was her favourite brother: every night, when not too sleepy, did he not read out Romeo, while she repeated Juliet from memory? I had wondered somewhat at William's quiet acceptance of Pamela's idea of going on the Stage, knowing that brothers' admiration of actresses does not as a rule extend to histrionic talent in their own families. He explained his attitude when Pamela was absent from the room.

"Nothing in the world cools one's ardour for an undertaking like encouragement: why, I should have taken more prizes at school if the masters had had the sense to oppose me.



Then he went on diffidently to tell us how he had latterly met a few actresses purely in the course of business. At that moment Pamela entered the room and inquired anxiously how actresses looked, off the Stage.

“Not as well as they look on,” replied William. “You see, Pamela, their complexions, however good to start with, get so totally ruined by the paint and powder they have to use, you know.”

Pamela grew pensive, and William continued smiling at his own diplomacy, until Jack ruffled him by remarking that the actresses he was acquainted with—if he did know any—might perhaps exchange their stockings; but he, Jack, doubted them having much to do on the Stock Exchange. The humour of this observation not striking William, he replied rudely, and a short quarrel ensued. Belinda and I listened attentively. If it had not been for the boys now and again falling out, there were lots of little mat-



ters we should never have known anything about.

Olivia came to see us the following Sunday afternoon. She arrived about three o'clock, looking a little dejected, as one might whose lot was made up of peculiarly trying circumstances.

"Bohemia," remarked Belinda interrogatively, "does not seem to agree with you?"

Olivia burst into tears.

Jack, whose experience of hysterics and their treatment was derived entirely from novels, ran for some water. He took what came first. That it happened to be his tumbler of painting water did not warrant uncharitable judgment. A long acquaintance with Jack taught us always to put in his motives as backgrounds to results, often curious.

Olivia drank a little, and refrained from mentioning the flavour of indigo.



“It’s all so different,” she sobbed, “from what I expected.”

“By-the-by, what did you expect?” inquired Belinda, who had found the day long, and thought we might begin at the beginning.

Olivia didn’t know.

“Then,” rejoined William, “how can you be disappointed?”

“Silly!” exclaimed Pamela, presumably addressing the last speaker. “If she knew what to expect how could she be disappointed?”

Olivia mopped her eyes and continued vaguely:

“It’s all so—so—too——”

“Clean?” hazarded Belinda.

“The Poet’s not a poet at all,” sobbed the disappointed one. “He writes for the newspapers—commonplace, everyday newspapers—and the work he’s engaged upon is a Blue Book.”



“Well, if Art is long,” observed William, “Literature seems to be broad in proportion.”

“His wife is not a bit artistic,” wept Olivia; “she gets her gowns straight from Paris, and goes calling on a bicycle.”

Belinda looked interested.

“There may be compensations,” she remarked, soothingly.

But Olivia didn't think so.

“He has such peculiar ideas, he takes a great interest in foreign politics, and says Dickens is overrated. Then, he keeps a notebook in his pocket, and puts down every silly thing that's said at table.”

“Why, you must be afraid to speak!” cried Jack.

This speech, as we afterward pointed out to him, was not calculated to soothe his sister's feelings. She began to cry again, and Pamela wept for company.

Altogether it was a damp afternoon.



“ Oh, don't go on the Stage, Pamela darling! ” exclaimed Olivia bitterly. “ It won't be a bit like what you think it! ”

There was perhaps more truth in this statement than the speaker was aware of.

The only point on which the Poet seemed an orthodox Bohemian was his objection to being spring-cleaned. This operation had lately happened and left him irritable.

“ Why, I knew there was something we had forgotten, ” cried I; “ of course, we never had a spring-cleaning. ”

“ Regarding life from a Bohemian point of view, ” said William, “ it seems to me there's no place like home. ”

Under the influence of a cup of tea and some strawberries from Uncle's last hamper, Olivia admitted there were compensations.

“ When I can't make out my own writing, which as you know sometimes happens, he (the Poet) doesn't mind me asking him if he



knows what he meant, and he says I may use his stamps."

"There, Jack!" cried Belinda, "didn't I tell you all professions have their perquisites?"

Jack wondered—aloud, as his way was—if the Poet knew what he had let himself in for when he gave Olivia permission to use his stamps. But Olivia contemplated a collapse of all her literary efforts.

"I sha'n't have any time to write for myself. He seems to think I'm only there to be at his beck and call," she added bitterly.

"Which, seeing he pays you to be his secretary, is of course absurd," commented William sympathetically.

We considered Olivia had been deceived. She had asked for the bread of poesy and received the stone of journalism. What if the Poet's political leaders were so worded that they almost convinced the Opposition? They only came out in papers—everyday news-



papers like the one that came in with the milk every morning, and which we should never have ordered had not Belinda argued that the Smiths' boy would think it so funny if we didn't take in a daily!

I wondered sometimes whether other people noticed a peculiarity of Olivia's. She would suddenly make a remark totally irrelevant to the subject in hand. That Sunday evening, as she put on her hat to return to—what there was of Bohemia—she said:

“I wish I had never read *Trilby*!”

William, too, would talk a jargon we did not understand. He flung himself down in a chair, remarking:

“Well, there's been a *slump* in Olivia's ideals.”



## CHAPTER VI.

### UNCLE JOSHUA'S VISIT.

UNCLE JOSHUA invited himself to stay with us. He had a few little business trifles to attend to in town, could we put him up for a few days? His letter reminded us that we should have asked him to come before: but it was too late to apologise, so we merely said how delighted we should be to see him; would he come as soon as he liked, and stay a week, not a few days?

“If we each take the responsibility of him for a day,” remarked Belinda, “he will not be such a very great nuisance.”

We explained this arrangement to Uncle on the Monday night of his arrival.

“To-morrow you're mine,” I said;



“Wednesday, Belinda’s; Thursday, Jack’s; Friday, Pamela’s; and on Saturday William will devote his half-holiday to your amusement, and on Sunday doubtless Olivia will grumble for your benefit.”

Uncle expressed himself delighted at our thoughtfulness.

“In case I should forget,” he observed, “will you remind me each morning to whom I belong?”

We put him in the room vacant by Olivia’s departure.

“Don’t get up till you’re called, Uncle, because William, having to catch the early train, must have his bath first, and it takes some time for the water to heat again.”

“Oh, of course William must be considered first,” agreed Uncle, and closed his door.

“He’s not half a bad little sort,” said Belinda meditatively, “but I quite understand how he came to lose his money.”

Uncle was easily pleased. As I was busy



about the house, he spent the whole of the next morning wandering from room to room looking at the furniture, and asking how much it cost. Belinda, who was drawing in the dining-room, found his presence somewhat disturbing.

“Oh, don’t fidget so!” she cried. “It’s Maria’s day, and she seems to be neglecting you.”

In the afternoon I gave him a bicycle lesson on William’s machine. He fell off a good many times, but I encouraged him to persevere.

“Just think how useful it would be to you in the country. ’Tis not as if you were a rich man and could afford horses.”

Toward evening William suggested that Uncle should do some gardening.

“There’s nothing like using your arms to take the stiffness out of your legs—and you must be stiff after that bicycle lesson. The garden wants weeding terribly. When you



come across a stone or a snail, chuck it into the garden next door—that's what I do."

"Your neighbours have not called upon you, I understand," replied Uncle, preparing to weed.

At breakfast on Wednesday Belinda reminded our visitor it was her turn to amuse him.

"I have to take some drawings up to the — office in Fleet Street. You can come with me. Then we'll go on, look at the shops, and come home outside an omnibus."

Belinda begged Uncle to wait below while she went upstairs to the editorial sanctum. He sat on the stairs and had a doze, for his night's rest had been much disturbed by bicycle nightmare. Business finished, they directed their steps toward Piccadilly Circus, up Regent Street, and along Oxford Street to Buzzard's.

"We sha'n't be home in time for lunch,"



said Belinda, "so we'll have a glass of lemonade and some cake." She insisted on paying for both. "If you want to spend your money, Uncle, you can buy me some trifle down Bond Street."

In Bond Street she remembered she wanted some buttons, and they went into a shop. When the assistant had turned to get the buttons Belinda murmured:

"You must buy something; we can't go out only having bought buttons."

Uncle couldn't remember what he wanted. He looked round vacantly at exquisite etceteras of feminine attire.

"You choose something," he whispered at last, "and I'll pay for it."

Belinda inquired the way to the blouse department, and spent ten minutes in deciding whether blue chiffon or pink silk would be most becoming.

"Blue's my colour—but then, it's more expensive," she sighed regretfully.



"A few shillings is not worth mentioning," returned Uncle, so Belinda decided on the blue. She insisted on taking it with her, and when they got outside the shop handed the box to Uncle, saying:

"People won't notice you carrying a parcel, they might stare at me."

So Joshua carried the parcel all down Piccadilly till they got a 'bus at Hyde Park Corner and started for home, Belinda chatting delightfully all the way.

William didn't see where Uncle's fun had come in on Belinda's day.

"He'll see me in the blouse," replied the owner of it.

Uncle was easily pleased.

Thursday he appeared rather tired. Jack kindly proposed spending a quiet morning together in his painting-room.

"I once did a day's shopping with the girls," he confided. "They spent five minutes at every window, and then said I had



hurried them so, that they couldn't remember what they wanted."

Then he made up a divan on the floor.

"I'm much in want of a model in a sleeping attitude—if you'd like to smoke a bit, I've no objection."

Uncle placed himself in the required position after handing his cigar-case to Jack, begging him to try one of its occupants. Then he dozed off; the artist woke him up once to explain that he couldn't draw him with his mouth open, but with this exception Uncle spent an entirely restful morning. The afternoon we spent quietly in the garden.

On Friday, Uncle maintained it was imperative he should go into the city. Pamela was not sure if she should let him go.

"It's my day to supply you with pleasure, and I don't care about the city."

"There's the Tower of London," observed Uncle, "that's quite worth seeing,



and we could come back on a steamboat part of the way."

Pamela agreed to this, only stipulating he was not to be more than an hour over his business. On her return, she said:

"After all, Uncle only had to go to the Bank of England—and he makes such a fuss about trifles. We met a person he knew just outside, who seemed surprised to see him."

"What did they talk about?" queried Belinda.

"Oh, William's gibberish," replied William's sister. "Stocks and shares, and bears and lions——"

"It's Olivia who talks about lions, not William," I corrected.

"Uncle was quite lively—for him," continued Pamela. "This Mr. Dash said, 'You're a warm man to-day, eh, Chilcott?' Uncle replied: 'Well, I am pretty warm; the thermometer is about 80° in the shade, I should say.' And they both laughed. Then



Uncle introduced me. Mr. Dash said, 'Lucky young lady to have you for an uncle—' 'Lucky Uncle, I think,' said——"

"That was nice of him," interrupted Belinda, "for of course any girls might have an uncle like Joshua, but it isn't every man has a niece like you, Pamela."

Pamela blushed with pleasure, and thinking it a propitious moment, mentioned that she would so like to try on Belinda's new blouse.

"Not to wear it, of course—but just to see how I look in it."

Belinda demurred. She would think about it.

"You see, I don't like other people putting on my things," she explained; "if they look nice in them it puts me out of conceit with myself, and if they don't look nice—why, it puts me out of conceit with my clothes."

The Vicar called early on Saturday morn-



ing, bringing some tickets for a local concert to be held that evening in the parish school-room. He hoped we would go and take Uncle with us.

After he had hurried away we expressed a wish to Uncle to have his photo. On hearing that it was many years since he had had one taken, we begged him to come, there and then, into Richmond and have it done. The notion pleased him and we all started together. He looked so small and lonely sitting up on the photographer's dais by himself, that Belinda hinted he would show to better advantage in a group; so we arranged ourselves gracefully round him. The photographer took the negative into the dark room, which gave Belinda the opportunity to remark, without fear of contradiction, she knew she would come out badly, as a strong desire to yawn had seized her just at the critical moment.

“But anyway I should look a sight,” she



concluded, mournfully. "I never come out well in a group."

"Then why not be taken alone?" said Uncle, rather surprised, for she had suggested the group herself.

Belinda modestly consented and was done in three attitudes.

When the photographer professed himself satisfied, she exclaimed:

"It hardly seems fair that I should be taken alone and not Maria or Pamela—you, Maria, especially ought to be done. The Church has asked several times for your photo."

But Uncle Joshua didn't approve of his nieces' photographs being sold for a charity, which was what he understood Belinda to mean. We might be taken separately if we would promise him solemnly to keep them strictly private, not otherwise.

It was a very successful morning.

"I don't think you've come out so very



badly, Uncle," said Belinda on our way home.

William spent his half-holiday taking Uncle for a long pull up the river.

"Joshua paid for the boat, I suppose," hazarded Belinda on their return.

"Joshua!" cried William. "No, I did, of course; he's the visitor, not I."

William's way of managing circumstances was less original than ours, still Uncle seemed to have been much struck with his ideas on hospitality. During supper he said suddenly:

"I should like you to invest a small sum for me, William. I feel it will be safe in your hands, my boy," and passed him a ten-pound note.

"Rather," responded his nephew heartily. "I'll put it in some safe concern, and keep it warm for you. I'm not one of those fools who play with large sums and run high risks, and end by losing all they've got."



I, recollecting how Uncle had dropped a fortune, meant only to give William a hint not to hurt his feelings, but William had no intuitive perceptions.

“That’s twice you’ve kicked me under the table, Maria!” he cried; “you might remember I’ve got a corn!”

The boys wouldn’t come to the concert; they preferred a smoke over a game of chess. When we reached the door of the schoolroom I drew out the tickets for the first time—they were only three, and we were four!

I knew Belinda expected me to offer to return; but I maintained a dead silence, having reasons of my own for thinking I should enjoy the concert.

“Well, Uncle must go back,” said she at length.

Uncle, not understanding quite what the discussion was about, intimated that he should be delighted.

“That’s a nice way to speak,” cried Be-



linda, "after all the sacrifices we've made to amuse you!"

Uncle, seeing he had made some mistake, got behind my sleeves.

Pamela had a gleam of intellect.

"If we sit close we might all four manage to sit on three chairs."

We carried this practical suggestion into effect. The Vicar came up and remarked on our looking a little warm.

"I'll see what I can do," he went on, grasping the reason of our tight appearance. In a few minutes he came back. "There's a seat here, Miss Maria, next to mine, if you will have it."

I took it. It was a very nice concert, and I thoroughly enjoyed it. When we got home and were going to bed, Belinda said:

"Well?"

"Well," I responded, "what?"

"Oh, nothing," answered my enigmatic sister, and got into bed.



Olivia came home on Sunday afternoon, and ran upstairs to take her hat off in her own room. She knew of Uncle Joshua's presence in the house, but was not aware of his occupying her apartment. She opened the door without knocking, and discovered its inmate spreading patent varnish on his boots with a guilty air, by the aid of his forefinger. Olivia had no manners. Instead of apologising for her abrupt entrance, or saying something pleasant by way of a greeting, she sat down on a chair and observed crossly:

“In my room, too!”

“Maria put me here,” stammered Uncle, apologetically.

“Maria was always liberal with other people's belongings,” continued my sister graciously. “I should have thought William might have blacked your boots, he has nothing to do on a Sunday.”

Olivia was suffering from irritability, which we forgave when we understood she



had spent the entire week making an index to the Poet's latest literary achievement.

"It's got regularly into my brain," she sighed. "I go about thinking what letter everything should be placed under. Every insignificant trifle has to be indexed. Take you, Uncle, for instance. You're Uncle, and Joshua, and Chilcott. So you would go down under U and J and C. In one place you'd be Chilcott, comma, Uncle Joshua; in the next Joshua Chilcott, comma, Uncle; and in the third, Uncle Joshua Chilcott, no comma. Oh, it's maddening!"

"I should think Chilcott, Joshua, would be enough," said the owner of the name, wiping a black forefinger meditatively on the sole of his boot. "You see, it isn't really necessary to mention the Uncle part of the business."

"Oh, of course, if you're ashamed of us," retorted Olivia, "there's no more to be said. . . . My room will smell now of blacking



for ever so long, and I'm coming home for holidays in six weeks."

Uncle expressed his intention of leaving orders with the nearest decorators for the room to be done up, whitewashed and repapered, on his departure, to remove any lingering odour of varnish, and Olivia was mollified.

"Let's have tea early and go for a walk," she pleaded; "it will help to get the index out of my brain."

So in an hour or so we left the house for a lengthy stroll. Owing to the varnish not having had time to dry, as we went along the dusty roads, Uncle's boots took on a more and more speckled appearance.

"He can't even clean his boots properly," said Olivia loudly, as he stepped on in front with Pamela. "I'm ashamed to be seen out with him."

Olivia was not a consistent Bohemian. Later, when she had left, Uncle remarked:



“I thought Olivia seemed a trifle put out.”

We discoursed on how she had met with a disappointment.

“The cause is a lost illusion, and the effect bad temper,” said I.

“She found mere prose where she had expected poetry,” summoned up Jack in conclusion.

“Or at least blank verse,” added William, who could never be induced to believe anything was poetry that did not rhyme.

Uncle was sorry to hear it; personally, he had been fortunate in retaining many illusions with which he had started in life.

Belinda said this remark strengthened her in the belief that people who cherished illusions had a silly habit of letting practical advantages slip through their hands.

This seemed so personal, that to turn the subject I begged Uncle to say what he thought of our furniture.



“Why, it’s very nice,” he answered, glancing round—“very nice, what there is of it.” This, perhaps, sounding a little feeble in his own ears, he added briskly—“and quite enough, such as it is.”

“It’s time you went to bed if you’re going to get silly,” said Belinda.

Uncle’s visit had been such a pleasure that we pressed him to stay another week; but he refused, so we spent the Monday morning in helping him to pack. Pamela cried as he bade us good-bye, and he, not knowing how near the surface were her tears, was touched.

“You must come and stay with me, little Pamela woman; and don’t be in too great a hurry to go on the Stage—it’s easy enough to go on, the difficulty is to get on.”

I have noticed that men resent being expected to know much about any profession outside their own, with the exception of the Stage; they all appear to be aware of something discreditable to the Drama.



Belinda was angry with Pamela for crying.

“He’ll think now, because you pumped up a few tears, that you care more for him than we do,” she said, as we stood by the gate watching the hansom out of sight; “and anyone can cry, at least I could if it didn’t make my nose so red. If we do go down to The Court, of course we shall go in order of age.”

“Then Maria will go first and not you, Belinda,” retorted Pamela, putting a damp handkerchief into her pocket.

“And if Maria,” said the second of the family complacently, “should happen not to be anxious to leave Brick Park just at present, remember in that case I should be the eldest.”



## CHAPTER VII.

### WE TAKE IN A BOARDER.

It was entirely Belinda's notion to take in a boarder.

"Nowadays," she said, "it is considered quite the thing to have a stranger within the gates for purely pecuniary reasons."

"What, a lodger!" cried Jack, in disgust.

"No, not a lodger, Jack; a paying guest."

Later she confessed that her idea was not quite original, but adapted from a book. Fiction was ever our guide, philosopher, and friend. Was she to blame if things didn't turn out in real life after the same fashion they had in the novel? Anyone at all well



read in the literature of the day must be aware of the great gulf fixed between life in the suburbs and Mudie's latest!

In Belinda's book the paying guest boarded with a widow and her lovely daughter, in a dear little secluded cottage on the borders of Devon. He spent his time innocently, fishing for trout in the morning and for compliments in the afternoon. The widow cooked the fish and the daughter supplied the compliments—so lavishly, indeed, that he came to feel he could not live without her. So he proposed, and was accepted as a captain on half-pay; and then he turned out to be a lord, with a castle of his own—not in the air but on the ground—supported by a substantial income. They were happy ever after, only his relations said among themselves there was evidently more than one sort of fishing in Devonshire.

Our boarder gave us a surprise, but there the parallel ended.



William thought we should do well to have a girl.

“Some American, now,” he suggested, “who wants to see life in London.”

But Belinda would not agree to this.

“Americans’ ideas on life are limited. I fear they don’t stretch as far as Brick Park, S.W. Besides, dear boy, a man is so much less trouble in the house than a girl. He’s out more, and doesn’t ask so many questions. If we feed him well, he won’t notice there isn’t a towel-rack in his bedroom, whilst a woman would be telling us she couldn’t sleep for fear the chair would catch cold with a damp towel upon it.”

“Oh, all right, have it your own way,” quoth William; “but don’t come down on me when the paying guest don’t pay.”

Privately Belinda confided to me another reason:

“You never know, Maria; suppose some designing woman came along. Jack is so



handsome, and even William is good-looking in a plain way. We couldn't, for the sake of appearances, begin by telling the boarder they haven't a sixpence between them."

I recalled how Olivia, in a pet, once said that the only thing Belinda was ever generous about was giving away her own sex.

Our first guest was a retired Colonel. He only stayed a week, and gave no reason for leaving, beyond that he felt sure the neighbourhood didn't agree with him. But to Mary he confided that his bed was so narrow, when he wanted to turn over he had to get out, walk round, and get in at the other side. We did not believe this story until we found that the Colonel pitched his retired tent at a longer established boarding-house than ours, a few yards down the road. Then Belinda pointed out how it was the essence of courtesy to tell tarradiddles when the truth would have hurt our feelings.

"There must be ups and downs to every



undertaking," she concluded. "For my part, I mean to talk to the Colonel as if I knew No. 15 was surrounded by pure oxygen."

She did, and the Colonel remained our very good friend, and frequently took us to Hurlingham.

Our second boarder was a pale, subdued young man, good-looking in a melancholy fashion, with an abstracted manner. He grew confidential as we fell to treating him as one of the family, and related how he was a widower, his wife having died but recently. We tried to cheer him up, encouraging him to talk about his troubles—a good talk will talk the sting out of most misfortunes. The result of our sympathy was for a while uncertain. He was out most of the day, returning each evening seemingly more weary and dispirited than the last. One night the clock had struck nine before he put in an appearance. We were sitting in the drawing-



room variously occupied, when he strode in carrying something in his arms which he deposited on the floor in our midst.

It was a baby boy about a year old!

We were silent from surprise; our boarder offered no explanation at first, but sat gazing at the child dejectedly.

“Where did you find it?” inquired William as the silence grew oppressive.

“Oh, it’s mine,” replied its parent, in the tone of one who would say—“A poor thing, but mine own.” “The truth is, the people I left it with after my wife’s death won’t keep it any longer. They say it cries when it is left in the house alone.”

“I should think so!” exclaimed Pamela indignantly, going down on her hands and knees to examine it closer. “Poor mite!”

The baby, attracted by her bright hair and caressing voice, gave a little coo of pleasure, ending abruptly in a great sigh, and then began to wail in self-pity.



“If I might keep him here a day or two,” broke in the father, looking anxiously from one to another, “just until I can find someone to look after him?”

“Of course!” we cried in a breath.

“Why didn’t you bring it at first with your other luggage?” asked Belinda coldly.

“What does it eat?” I interrupted.

He didn’t know. We called in Mary, whom nothing ever surprised. She rose to the emergency, and said, “Mellin’s Food”; and might she take it in the kitchen? Pamela went too, but curiosity kept Belinda and I from following.

The father looked so harassed and depressed, that Jack begged him to come into the next room and have some supper.

“Let the little beggar stay,” urged William; “I will look after him—he shall be my little unpaying guest.”

William, by judiciously giving notice at the very time he was most required, had been



asked to remain at a higher salary, an offer he accepted with an air of combined resignation and self-sacrifice.

He became the baby's slave, having it to early breakfast with him in the morning, and keeping it up late at night. He bought automatic toys for its amusement, and altogether showed himself "a born parent," as Mary expressed it. The boy was a chubby, happy little soul, who expanded like a flower in the sunlight under judicious care and much caressing. Now and again it would fall into abstracted fits of thought like its father, clasping one tiny foot with his hand, and gazing with unseeing eyes into some dim futurity we could not enter. On these occasions, Jack, if near, invariably used it as a model. In its ordinary moments it was never still enough to be of use to our artist.

The father's gratitude was touching, especially to Belinda, when she made the boy a pinafore. He never noticed the garment



was in two shades and three materials—gathered from the family piece-bag. He told Pamela how Belinda reminded him of his dead wife.

“She has the same sweet smile, and the same simple, guileless manners.”

“I decided,” smiled Pamela, repeating this conversation, “it was better not to tell him that she got out of her turn to amuse the boy by pretending she had a toothache.”

A fortnight passed. One evening our guest never came home at all; another day went by, and still he appeared not. We were growing anxious, when on the third morning Belinda received a letter postmarked Liverpool. Our late inmate wrote that by the time we received his epistle he would be on the sea, bound for America; he had tried in vain to obtain occupation in London without success, and risked his last earnings in setting forth for a new country. He apologised for leaving the boy on our hands, and



would send for him directly he had got some sort of home, however poor, together. Till then he trusted we would not turn the child adrift. The letter concluded by thanking us for our kindness, which had kept the writer from despair.

Pamela cried in sympathy with the pathos. Jack laughed and tossed the baby, who had not missed its father in the least, in the air.

Belinda was mortified into admitting that boarders were an utter failure.

“I did think he was a gentleman!” she cried angrily.

Mr. Kittiwake, who had dropped into the habit of discussing our family plans with the freedom of a relation and the self-assurance of a stranger, came in to see us nearly every day. He took an increasing dislike to the deserted orphan left in our charge, and suggested, as I finished reading its father’s letter aloud, that we should hand the child over to



some nice motherly woman who would look after it.

“There’s Mrs. Davis now—she——”

“Never!” I interrupted. “How do you know she would be good to the darling? Besides, William would never part with him.”

“Well, of course, you must take your own way, Miss Chilcott,” said the Vicar stiffly.

“My name is Maria,” I answered with dignity, “and you seem to forget that it is our duty—our duty—to look after the fatherless.”

“Well, that’s just the point I was coming to. Mrs. Davis has had several children of her own, and understands them thoroughly. And you know—I don’t mention it to hurt your feelings, but you told me yourself you had missed a button the boy was playing with.”

“He may have swallowed the button, or he may not. It may be on the floor still——”



“Oh, of course, if the floor hasn’t been swept since, there’s some hope,” began the Vicar cheerfully.

“This room is swept every day,” I cried indignantly, “I do it myself; but I might, it’s just possible I overlooked the button.”

Mr. Kittiwake apologised for his insinuation, and begged me to believe he considered me the very latest edition of the last chapter of Proverbs.

“But seriously, Miss Maria, when that boy comes to grow up he will have to be educated and put into some profession. Do you really feel inclined to take the responsibility?”

We had not looked so far ahead.

“His father says he will send for him directly he can,” I maintained faintly.

The Vicar was silent save for a contemptuous sniff, which made me angry.

“Only last Sunday,” I cried, “you preached about people drawing uncharitable



conclusions! You'd better go home and read your own sermon."

My listener gasped. Perhaps he had never been spoken to in that way before. He seized his hat and rose offendedly.

"Oh, you can go!" I went on, picking up a duster I had been using on his entrance and flicking a chair vigorously.

He went without a word.

Someone has said there is no noise as effective as silence. When he had about reached the front door I recollected how wrong it was to be disrespectful to the Vicar of one's parish. If I called "Theophilus" instead of "Mr. Kittiwake," it was because I had fallen into the habit of using his Christian name to myself when thinking of him. He came back and stood in the doorway. The bead fringe, an item in Pamela's scheme of furnishing, parted and hung round his head, rather detracting from his dignity.



“ I may think over your plan of sending the boy to Mrs. Davis.”

“ Is that all? ”

“ That’s all—I’m afraid I’ve rather wasted your time this morning.”

But instead of going, the Vicar stepped into the room and seated himself with an obstinate expression.

“ You do want dusting,” I observed critically; “ your coat looks as if it hadn’t been brushed for a twelvemonth.”

“ Maria! ”

“ Well? ”

“ Say you are sorry.”

“ Sorry—what for? ”

“ What for? For—er—for not taking my advice, my pastoral advice, Miss Chilcott, in the spirit it was offered. For being rude, very rude in fact, Maria,” he concluded, dropping the clerical tone and assuming the expression of an injured school-boy.



“But I’m not sorry—you wouldn’t like me to tell an untruth to please you?”

The Vicar sighed and sat still.

“I will let you know—send a note round—when I am,” I said.

Still silence. Far in the distance I heard the hum of a street piano; upstairs Pamela was singing softly to its tune.

The fresh morning light fell on the Vicar’s face as he sat immovable. He looked tired and depressed. After all—

“Well, I suppose I was rude,” I admitted grudgingly.

“You were,” he assented cheerfully. Then he rose, taking the duster from my hand. I prepared to listen to a homily, but instead these words fell on my ear:

“I love you, Maria.”

Surprise restored my self-assurance.

“Really!” I retorted, moving away. “One would hardly have guessed it, judging from our previous conversation.”



“I’ve loved you ever since I saw you, ever since I’ve known you, especially since you sent me an anonymous Postal Order for half-a-crown to show your sympathy with the deficiency in the offertory——”

“I never did—never, never, never; some horrid girl in love with you——”

“Oh, come,” said the Vicar, smiling; “why, it was folded in a sheet of paper stamped with this address.”

Then I recalled Belinda’s confidence, how she had sent a gift to the Church. She was never consistent: it was like her to send it anonymously in a sheet of paper which gave away the donor. I debated mentally whether I should explain this or not.

But no, he might go back and begin to love Belinda.

“I’ve changed a good deal since then, Mr. Kittiwake.”

“You grow prettier every day,” agreed the Vicar comfortably.



Whose dignity could stand against a proposal of this sort? Not mine.

Theophilus, as he desired me to call him, helped to finish dusting the room. He broke two ornaments, was very slow, and shook his duster out of the window in such a way that the dust all flew back in his face.

As twelve struck he remembered having made an appointment for eleven, and commenced saying good-bye with reluctance.

He may have been, as was said, weak about the knees, but his arms were strong and tender.

“I suppose,” he hazarded presently, “that I must come and have a talk with William—he appears to be the head of the family.”

“Oh, William likes you!”

“That’s kind of him. Do you think Belinda likes me?”

“Well,” I replied, dubiously, “Pamela does.”



“ I said Belinda! ”

“ The truth is—to be open with you—Belinda laughs at you a good deal. You would rather know at once, wouldn't you?—you don't mind? ”

“ Oh, not at all,” responded Theophilus; but he bit the end of his moustache vexedly.

“ After all, who's Belinda——”

“ Belinda's your sister,” replied my future husband, sententiously; “ and of course I wish all your relations to like me as I wish to like them all.”

“ Shall I have to like all yours? ” I queried, blankly.

“ I've only got one, an uncle——”

“ That's all I've got——”

“ Yes, and by-the-by, Maria, when Mr. Chilcott was here I noticed that you—all of you—didn't treat him—er—well, like an uncle, in fact.”

“ If you have a copy of *How to Treat an Uncle*, you might lend it to me. But all the



same we cried when he went away; what more could a man expect? ”

“ Would you cry if I went away, Maria, little woman? ”

I thought he would never go—in the hall, too!

When he at last left, a sudden idea struck me. I ran out and caught him up at the end of our secluded road.

“ Theophilus, you really do mean to marry me? ”

“ Of course,” he answered, looking puzzled.

“ You never mentioned the word ‘ marriage ’ when we were talking.”

“ I supposed you would understand my intentions were honourable,” remarked the person addressed, loftily. He was so quickly offended.

“ I did; then I recollected that in books the heroine always gets angry if the actual word ‘ marriage ’ isn’t mentioned.”



“When you’re my wife you sha’n’t read so many rubbishy novels,” replied the Vicar, at the same moment producing a note from his pocket. “In case you were out, I brought this to leave—you’d better read it. It will, perhaps, dispel any doubts as to my intentions.”

“Oh, no, I don’t really want—well, perhaps, just to satisfy Belinda; she might not believe.”

But Theophilus put it back in his pocket.

“I don’t care about other people reading my letters to you, especially Belinda. She might make fun of it.”

Which was exactly what she would have done.

“But how can I answer,” I asked meekly, “if I don’t read it?”

He wavered; finally, on my promising no eyes but mine should ever see it, handed it over.

I read it twice or more, and sent the an-



swer by Mary, in case it should get lost in the post. Mary congratulated me, saying of course she should keep her promise of living with the first member of the family that got married.

“And I wish you joy, Miss Maria; and as it couldn’t be Miss Pamela, I’d rather it was you than Miss Belinda.”

When Belinda came in from a long morning’s sketching in town, I related what had occurred in her absence. She promised never to divulge that she sent the Postal Order.

“Though I shouldn’t have wasted it had I guessed he was going to be my brother-in-law.”

“He thinks you don’t like him, Belinda.”

“Well, he’s hit the right nail on the head for once in his life. Still, I’ll try to be nice to him for your sake; and, Maria, I think you’d be more comfortable in your mind if you paid me back that half-crown.”

Which I did.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### A LETTER FROM BOHEMIA.

WE had neither seen nor heard from Olivia for nearly a fortnight, when the early post brought us a long, type-written epistle from the one absent member of our circle.

Pamela, to whom it was addressed, volunteered to read it aloud at the breakfast-table.

“It’s in Olivia’s best literary style,” she announced, “and begins:

“My dear P. and the rest, including Jinkie—

“Do not, I pray you, picture me still weeping among the ashes of disappointment, clothed in the sackcloth of lost illusions.

“Illusions are never lost; they are merely



exchanged. I have exchanged mine on Bohemia.

“The ideas I cherished so fondly would not have been in keeping with the end of this century. As you know, I would rather have chosen to live in the days when to write anything longer than your own name and address laid you open to the charge of eccentricity, than in these when one can write a novel or wear a divided skirt without being other than commonplace. Truly is it written, ‘Man knoweth not his latter end,’ neither, unfortunately, hath he any choice in the date of his beginning.

“Bohemia improves vastly on acquaintance.”

“It’s more than the toast does,” interrupted Jack, making an onslaught on the butter.

“Its spirit is and ever will be the same, but its landmarks alter with the tides of each generation. It is no longer a country in-



habited by a few geniuses, and many ingenious failures, for it now owns no genius—at least, none universally so admitted; neither has it any failures, for all, apparently, have a few believers. Its boundaries of late have been greatly enlarged—to admit of large numbers of the Upper Ten Thousand. The Upper Ten have developed brains; and Bohemia in return has yoked itself with conventions, and now leaves visiting cards where formerly it left marks on the door-handle. There is, too, some difficulty in deciding whether it is better to be a Social Lion in Bohemia, or a Bohemian in Society; both have an excellent time, and a large circle of imitators.

“By-the-by, ask Maria if she would look out and do up my green silk skirt. Velveteen is one of the illusions I have exchanged—for *chiné*.”

Here Pamela paused to begin her coffee, and Belinda went on with the letter:



“I have asked for a holiday—a whole holiday — next Wednesday. ‘My eldest brother comes of age,’ said I in extenuation of my demand; ‘if you can spare me, I should like to be present.’ The Poet seemed surprised, but consented, remarking he never knew before that people ever came of age in the suburbs, but I might go by all means, and he hoped I should enjoy it. So I shall come early—early—early in the morning, and stay late.

“I made my first celebrated acquaintance under a cloud of misapprehension. If it had not been for his inopportune arrival I should have spent last Sunday afternoon with you as usual. He came to call, found his intention frustrated, there being no one at home; the parlour-maid suggested the possibility of Mrs. Poet returning shortly, whereupon he decided to wait upon the chance. Mrs. Poet’s not at home resolved itself into a rest after lunch in her boudoir. ‘Pray go’ (this to



me) ‘and talk to him; it’s only Brown—say I shall probably be in soon.’ ‘Only Brown’ appeared a pleasant but in no way remarkable personage. He opened the conversation with the aid of the weather, after I had introduced myself and begged him to await the return of his hostess. He told me he had been to church that morning, and I gathered he had spent the time by reckoning how many degrees the thermometer went up to each additional worshipper.

“I adroitly used his opening to turn the conversation into a more personal channel. His name conveyed nothing to me, and I did not want to spend more time than I could help talking to a nobody.

“‘Whether one feels the heat or not depends greatly on one’s occupation. Now what do you do?’

“‘Oh, I—er—I paint a little, and draw a little,’ he said modestly, pulling his moustache.



“It was as I had thought; here I had lost my train having to stay and talk to a mere beginner, with one foot, perhaps only a toe, on the ladder of renown, and the other\* still deep among the submerged Middle Classes.

“But it was my duty to be polite, so we had a long chat about Art and artists, and I advised him to stick steadily to one branch, as he owned to having dabbled in oils, water-colours, and even tried illustrating. Seeing that he was still young enough to make a career possible, I pointed out his best plan would be to begin again at the beginning, and begged him to go in for a thorough course of School of Art training.

“Then Mrs. Poet came in with her bonnet on, and murmured something about the heat in the park being overpowering. We had tea, and the visitor departed.

“‘Is his name really Brown?’ I said, more for something to say than any other reason.



“ ‘Why, of course, dear, Brown, R.A.; surely you’ve heard of him.’

“ I tried to forget about the School of Art, and nearly had when it was recalled to me next morning. I went into the City to get some type-writing paper. The Poet said I might go in an omnibus—he’s very good at stretching my secretarial duties to include something pleasant—so I started. A ’bus came along, full outside, but the conductor was missing. It appeared a good opportunity for practising getting on without stopping the vehicle. I ran, gave a little jump, and sank gracefully into a corner. The conductor came down and clipped my ticket reproachfully. ‘Hif there ’ad been a accident, Miss, I should a been blamed.’ ‘You would,’ I agreed cheerfully, ‘for talking to the driver instead of looking out for passengers.’

“ Then I noticed I had planted my parasol down on the toe of a passenger next to me. I looked at its owner to apologise.



“It was Brown, R.A., grinning appreciatively at my sally with the conductor. I begged his pardon, and he complimented me on the way I had got in. I confided my ambition was to get out when the 'bus was moving.

“‘Pray don't,’ he said, quite earnestly, ‘you might come on your nose, and that would be a pity.’

“He then feared he had kept me in on Sunday afternoon, as afterward he recalled that I was dressed for walking, which gave me the opportunity of delicately insinuating I had not known at the time I was entertaining an Academician unawares. But he assured me he had never enjoyed a conversation so much in his life, and during the drive—for he, too, had to go in the City—begged permission to paint me.

“He says it isn't often that he got the chance of painting the true Titian colouring.

“‘You shall have the first study when it's



done,' he added, for I had to demur a little not to appear too anxious.

“ Only two weeks to August, and then the holidays.

Ever yours,

“ OLIVIA.

“ P.S.—Tell William my hair isn't red, it's Titian.”

“ Fancy telling an R.A. to go to a School of Art. Olivia's got no tact,” said Belinda; “ and I've had no breakfast.”



## CHAPTER IX.

### HOW JACK CAME OF AGE.

OLIVIA arrived early on the morning of Jack's birthday. So early, indeed, that the hero of the occasion had not risen. After well rattling the handle of his locked door, she seated herself beside his hot-water can in the passage and commenced to remonstrate loudly with him on his habits of late rising.

Jack mistook her for Belinda, who, the soul of punctuality herself, generally called each member of the household on her own account.

Our voices were all much alike; so similar, indeed, that Belinda once obtained possession of some facts I particularly desired to withhold by speaking disparagingly of herself



in the third person from the bottom of the stairs when I was engaged in a room above. Olivia recalled this incident, and, thinking to arouse Jack's sympathy and hasten his toilet, acted on the recollection.

"There's poor Olivia," she screamed, "she'll be hurrying down early, and find no breakfast ready!"

"Not she," responded Jack sleepily. "Olivia's not the sort of old bird to be caught with the chaff of early rising. *She* won't start without her breakfast!"

"I wouldn't have got up at half-past six, and walked all the way, if I'd known you were going to come of age in bed," returned a voice whose tone of martyrdom, streaked with asperity, was peculiarly Olivia's own.

Jack, hearing his mistake, and not possessing any natural quickness for extricating himself from unpleasant dilemmas, was silent.

Olivia descended to the kitchen to say she would faint from sheer exhaustion if break-



fast was not on the table within five minutes. Mary considered it a breach of birthday etiquette to commence without the person whose appearance into the world was being celebrated, so she compromised matters by bringing Olivia a strong cup of tea from her own teapot.

Jack was immensely pleased with his presents. Olivia had brought him a book, a nice book, handsomely bound, called *The Influence of Politics on Greek Art*. Jack thanked her warmly.

“But what are all these pencil-marks?” he inquired, turning the leaves. “‘One—one—two—two, quote 345.’ It looks almost as if it had belonged to somebody?”

Olivia blushed.

“Oh, those? Those are particular bits that seemed worthy of careful notice. I—I fancied you might like to learn them by heart.”

Jack said he would—when three Sun-



days came in a week—and turned to unwrap his next present. Olivia whispered to me:

“I meant to rub them out—they are the Poet’s marks. He had the book sent for review and asked me if I’d accept it, as he found he couldn’t spare me more than four afternoons a week to go out and look for a present for Jack. He said,” continued Olivia, relapsing into a loud tone of indignation, “he’d never heard of anyone taking so long to come of age in his life.”

Belinda gave a large bottle of lavender water, with which Jack was delighted.

“It’s a ripping idea of yours, Belinda, to give what is even more useful to the donor than the recipient. I shall give you a pipe on your birthday.”

My gift took the form of a pair of embroidered slippers.

“Oh, thank you, Maria! just what I wanted, they’ll be so comfortable to put on of



an evening; but why did you choose such an ecclesiastical-looking design?"

"It was one I had by me—but try them on, Jack."

They fitted very well—a fortunate accident, seeing I had originally intended them for Theophilus, who had distinctly declined to allow that they fitted him, being in fact a couple of sizes too small. There was no need to tell Jack this, but it fell out that the Vicar came in directly breakfast was over, bringing with him a nice set of paint-brushes. He had evidently prepared a pleasant brotherly-in-law little speech to accompany them, but taken by surprise he forgot it and blurted out:

"Why, you've got my shoes on, Jack!"

Jack was naturally indignant.

"Your shoes, I like that! Why, Maria has just given them to me—worked them on purpose for my birthday; besides, you couldn't get into them."



“That’s so,” replied the owner of the clerical feet. “But I understood Maria to say she was going to enlarge them.”

I heard William, ever obvious, murmuring behind me, “She’s put her shoe in it this time,” when Pamela hastily drew Jack’s attention to the brushes, and Olivia drew the Vicar’s attention to herself.

“I have not seen you since,” she began, vaguely gracious—Olivia could be very gracious—“but I may congratulate you, mayn’t I, though I am Maria’s sister? I have known her every day for nineteen years, nineteen long years, and I assure you she would be a treasure to any household.”

And then Belinda, whose mind was running on summer sales of haberdashery, chimed in with:

“I consider Maria quite a bargain, myself.”

Theophilus, touched by this display of



sisterly appreciation, forgot all about the shoes.

William gave his brother a packet of some tobacco they both held in high esteem, and a cigar. The latter, he said, had a history.

“Uncle left it behind him in the agitation of parting, so I can’t take any credit for its flavour—’twas not my choice—but for not smoking it, I deserve great praise. Why, without even being lighted it burnt a hole in my pocket!”

Jack quite understood this, and to save William the pain of practising any further self-denial, lit the cigar at that moment, only pausing to press William to fill up his pipe from the new tobacco. William had a whole holiday. We had begged him to ask for it, but to make sure of there being no refusal and consequent ill-feeling between him and his employer, he took the holiday first and asked for it afterward. His plan, he explained, was a sort of insurance against disappoint-



ment, the only drawback to the day's enjoyment occurring on the following morning.

Pamela presented Jack with one of her new photos, in which she looked quite lovely, inserted in a home-made frame, together with some toffee, also home-made. Of the two, Jack, always critical, thought the toffee was the better made. Mary begged him to accept a set of fine steel knitting-needles.

"My respectful compliments to Master Jack, and I do 'ope, now 'e's come of age and is a gentleman grown, so to speak, 'e'll leave off borrowin' the kitchen skewers to clean his pipes with."

The second post arriving at ten, brought a small parcel from Uncle Joshua. It turned out to be a box containing a set of studs. Jack proudly pronounced them gold; but Belinda, comparing the current value of that precious metal with Uncle's income, which she had assessed—without authority—at a few hundreds a year, derided this notion.



However, Jack stuck to his opinion, though to convince Belinda he determined to find out whether he was right.

“How?” queried Pamela, whose imagination had flown to some dangerous chemical experiment and a possible explosion.

“Oh, there are ways and means,” returned Jack significantly.

“You might ask your Uncle,” suggested William.

Olivia snubbed him for his want of manners.

“You’ll be inviting us to write and ask how much they cost next!”

But William, unabashed, complained that we had mistaken his meaning. He alluded to another relative, not Joshua.

Olivia’s absence from home may have accounted for her forgetting how William roasted this ancient chestnut on every opportunity.

The boys said they had a surprise for



us, to take place at noon punctually, so we separated to perform a few domestic duties necessary to the comfort of even our casually managed household. The Vicar too left, promising to return in time to be surprised at the appointed hour.

The first indication of anything unusual was a sudden strange and uneven bumping noise upon the stair. We hurriedly assembled to inquire into the cause, and beheld William. He had attired himself after the manner of a sandwich-man, and the bumping proceeded from the ironing-board which decorated his back coming into frequent contact with the stairs. A drawing-board hung from his neck in front by a piece of string, and both boards announced in bold letters—a trifle smudged from having been drawn with charcoal—that Jack would hold a Private View in his painting-room that morning, precisely at noon. With one hand William gave us each a card of admission, illustrated



with a portrait of the artist by himself, and with the other he rang the dinner-bell. To ring a bell is not dramatically correct for a sandwich-man, it savours more of a town-crier, but it was effective—and noisy.

The artist came out of his studio to witness the impression made by his advertisement, and was so struck by what the sandwich-man called his *total ensemble*, that he begged him to remain a moment upon the stairs whilst he rapidly sketched a memento of the scene.

It seemed a pity that no one outside the family should enjoy the spectacle William presented, so we suggested that he should walk down the road and show himself to our neighbours. He fell in readily with the idea, and would have carried it out had he not met Theophilus at the gate.

The Vicar surveyed the carmined nose, battered hat, and ragged garments of his



future brother-in-law for some moments in silence.

“ Well, you are rather a surprise,” he began at length, trying to enter into the spirit of the joke—rather a lame attempt, for Theophilus seemed ever to have grown up remembering he was an only child and an orphan.

“ You see, it’s a pity to waste this get-up on the desert air of the family,” explained the sandwich-man, “ so I’m just going to surprise the neighbourhood. What can I cry out?—they won’t take any interest in Jack’s private view; hasn’t anything been lost in the parish lately, Kittiwake? ”

Theophilus had gradually edged William back into the hall. He then closed the front door and set his back against it.

“ The only thing I know, William, in danger of getting lost is your reputation for sanity, which, as Vicar of the parish, it’s plainly my duty to prevent happening.”



After some demur the discussion ended by the sandwich-man preceding the cleric upstairs, the latter holding up the ironing-board as if it were a train.

Jack had divided his drawings into three classes: (1) Reproductions of those which had been published hung on one wall; they were not so many as we could have wished, but still they testified to a certain amount of success and a decided improvement in his work. (2) A few, arranged on the table, upon which he was still engaged. (3) Caricatures, mostly grossly personal, covered every available space vacant in the room. Belinda, who liked a finger in whatever pie was going, had added a few of her black-and-white fashion illustrations.

“I’m surprised at Belinda making public such articles of attire,” observed Olivia, casting a severe eye on the drawing of a much frilled silk petticoat. “Of course in the Academy one expects some-



thing—not—not quite—but at a Private View——”

“Oh, we haven’t asked Mrs. Grundy, Olivia!” cried Jack lightly, but Belinda maintained that we had.

“Theophilus is our Mrs. Grundy,” she remarked loud enough for him to hear. Indeed, between Belinda’s sketches which he did not like to look at on the one hand, and the caricatures of himself which he pretended not to see on the other, the Vicar, I feared, passed an uncomfortable hour.

Then William rang the dinner-bell and gave out that there would be a private auction of a few of Jack’s sketches held that evening in the garden, to be preceded by an entertainment to begin at eight.

To occupy the afternoon we had arranged some bicycle races. Racing was technically illegal on the Queen’s highway; but in the quiet corner where we lived it was scarcely a highway, for there was only one opening to



Triangle Lawn, and the traffic therefore restricted to a few vehicles having immediate business in the neighbourhood. The boys had their bicycles, and hired two ladies' machines as near alike in weight as possible.

Olivia decided not to race, getting up so early had taken the necessary energy out of her; and as Pamela invariably got off her machine if she saw a dog or a cat in case she should run over it, and also when any vehicle came in view in case it should run over her, she too concluded not to enter the lists.

The course was once round the triangle; the road being narrow, we decided not to ride more than two abreast at a time; the starting point and winning post were exactly opposite our own door, Olivia being umpire.

Jack hung back a little as the time to start drew near, and wondered what people would say; so to encourage him Belinda and I opened the races. She insisted on having the right-hand side of the road, to which



alone I attributed the fact that she won. Then the boys, William with the air of a professional scorcher, and Jack trying hard to appear as if setting forth for an ordinary ride, went round and were back before we considered them well started. The latter believed he would have won, had he not been obliged to ride uphill over his brother's hat, which had blown off and fallen in his path.

"Then I'm sure I wish you hadn't," retorted William, looking ruefully at his head-gear. "My hat goes down-hill now in the wrong place."

Then Jack raced me, returning an easy victor; but against Belinda he lost by a couple of yards. I, a little dispirited by two failures, suggested that William should be handicapped for my last race. He gave me half the course, hoping it would be enough—it wasn't, as was proved by my failing to win. This sort of handicap doesn't really count: the fear of breaking one's nose is a real useful



handicap, especially if it is a nice nose; though with William's sort, even this wouldn't prove an obstacle.

By the time the last race—between Belinda and William—was imminent, quite a crowd had collected; the inhabitants gathered at their windows, and betting ran high among loitering errand-boys. Our baker's boy, in a friendly spirit, stood near the one opening to warn any approaching vehicle not to spoil the fun. Belinda disdained the offer of a handicap. Just as they were about to start the Colonel appeared, carrying a lovely box of French sweets. He had understood it was Pamela's birthday; on finding it was Jack's, he feared the sweets might not prove so acceptable. So we told him how we were spending the afternoon and suggested the sweets should be given as a prize, an item we had entirely overlooked; though Pamela did say later that she, personally, thought it would have been in far better taste not to tell



the Colonel of his mistake, but let him continue to think it was her birthday.

Olivia gave the signal to start. Belinda came in a smiling first, for William, so great was his self-assurance, had stopped midway and got off to speak to an acquaintance, which self-conceit lost him the victory; but then William had no taste for bonbons. Belinda received them graciously from the Colonel, who made quite a neat little speech about the new woman riding a bicycle and the pleasure of an old man giving the prize. Then Jack took the Colonel up to see the Private View, and the old gentleman, being a little short-sighted, picked up some caricatures of himself before we had time to hide them, and mistook them for skits on a certain military neighbour with whom he was not on the best of terms, and enjoyed the joke immensely. So did we. The Colonel stayed to tea and went home in an excellent temper.

Directly after supper we went into the



garden, where the entertainment was to take place, the conclusion of the day's pleasure. Mary was accommodated with a chair, but she preferred to stand near the scullery door which opened on to the garden; at intervals she dived into the kitchen, returning with a damp plate, which she dried whilst watching the performance.

Belinda led off with a skirt dance, draped in a remnant of some light accordion-pleated material she had purchased at a July sale. Not having had time to fashion it into shape, she pinned it gracefully over her ordinary costume. The exercise of dancing became the undoing of the pins. William thought an "Odds and Ends Dance" would have been an appropriate title for this item of the programme. Belinda had an encore, principally because Olivia, who had sat indoors to play the dance music, insisted upon coming out to see whilst I played the piano.

Then Pamela sang a negro melody with



guitar accompaniment, and we all joined heartily in the chorus. It takes all sorts to make a world; but the people next door struck us as a strange sort to sit in the house on a hot evening with every window aggressively shut fast.

Olivia next gave us a recitation. Finding it impossible to recite on a level with the audience, she begged William to erect a platform out of the ironing-board supported on two chairs. Mounting this, she announced:

“The title of the recitation I am about to give you is, ‘The Index-Haunted Man,’ by that well-known authoress, Miss Olivia Chilcott.”

“Hear, hear,” cried Jack, feebly as a cock who, waked in the night, crows mistaking the moonlight for morning; but William was not so encouraging.

“Haven’t you got over that index yet?” he groaned. But Olivia, unheeding, repeated her title and commenced:



“ I am a private secretary,  
My age is twenty-four ;  
It only varies by a shade,  
A little less than more——”

“ Why, you’re only nineteen,” I expostulated; “ nineteen from twenty-four leaves five—you can’t call five a shade? ”

“ It’s colouring the truth,” explained the recitress, “ so it must be a shade.

“ I always knew my alphabet,  
But now I never can  
Forget it for a moment,  
I’m an index-haunted man.”

Seeing the exigencies of rhyme demanded change of sex for the time being, we let this pass uncontradicted.

“ I do not live by rule of thumb,  
Nor yet by rule of three ;  
I live, oh, much against my will,  
By rule of A B C.

“ When, rising in the morning,  
I hear the clock strike eight,  
I know that eight comes under E,  
And L is right for late.”



"You weren't late this morning for a wonder," interrupted Belinda.

"Indeed, I came too early," agreed Olivia, looking meaningly at Jack, "but you must not interrupt."

"And Jack of course goes under J,  
Pamela under P,  
Though how I'd like occasionally  
To put her under D."

"Why," asked Pamela discontentedly, "why should you wish to put me under D?"

"It's D—— with a dash after it," explained Olivia, "and it's generally when you take my button-hook and forget to put it back."

Pamela begged her not to enter into details, but to proceed. I felt glad, on the whole, that Theophilus had pleaded want of time for not joining us that evening.

But Olivia had not written any more, so the recitation ended abruptly; at some future



time she promised to recite it again, with a termination.

Then the auction of Jack's drawings took place. William was the auctioneer, using the coal-hammer with quite a professional ability, and assuming a manner of jocular orthodoxy to the occasion.

Jack consented to take payment in kind for his sketches. Thus, a fine caricature of the Colonel measuring the width of his bed with a ruler and comparing it with his own shoulders was handed over to Belinda in exchange for an old penknife. Jack, on receiving this token of barter, exclaimed that he had often wondered where that knife was, and asked Belinda where she had found it.

"If you are all going to give me back things you've borrowed and forgotten to return," said he, "I don't see where the fun of this show comes in!"

William insisted that the knife was a fair



exchange for the Colonel, but the artist considered it simply throwing the British Army away.

“To borrow one’s knife and then return it when it’s too blunt to use is——”

“Exchange is no robbery,” broke in the auctioneer rudely. “We now come to Lot 2. What may I say for them—a nice little lot?”

Olivia bid some postage-stamps which had lain fallow in her purse ever since the Poet had extended his hospitality to franking her letters. The sketches were illustrations of her last letter, which Jack had sketched on reading the same: they represented the incident of Olivia jumping into the ’bus and falling short of her destination.

“Which I forgive on account of its being so clever,” said our Bohemian, handing over the stamps as if they were waste paper.

I wanted Lot 3, a certain set of drawings mainly devoted to showing off various char-



acteristics of the Vicar; but not wishing to part with any of my own goods in exchange, I volunteered a promise not to dust Jack's painting-room for a fortnight. He was satisfied, but William demurred.

“Promises,” he said, with his usual want of originality, “have been known to be made of pie-crust. I grant you Maria's crust is substantial, still it is the rule at sales to place some deposit with the auctioneer as a guarantee of good faith and security against leaving the article on his hands.”

So I fetched my best duster and laid it on the platform.

“These sketches,” then cried the auctioneer, “are now the property of Maria. The artist has exchanged them for an accumulation of dust upon his private premises. The lady has a personal interest in the subject of the drawings, which makes them valuable—to her only. From the point of view of an Art auctioneer, I should say they were not



only rough sketches *of*, but also rough sketches *on*, the Rev. Mr. Kittiwake of this parish."

Mary had no taste in caricature; she exchanged a promise to make a particular kind of cake for a small pen-and-ink drawing of Pamela she had long coveted.

Jack's studio was much reduced in cardboard and his collection of miscellaneous odds and ends greatly increased by the auction.

About half-past ten Olivia asked William if he was ready.

"What for?" queried he in reply. "Haven't I done enough for one day?"

Jack assured him that he had.

"Indeed, one would think, from the way you've been going on, it was your birthday, and not mine."

Olivia had understood William to have promised to see her back to Bohemia, but it seemed a surprise, almost a shock, to William



to find this was expected of him. He stipulated that they should wait for refreshment, and they delayed to partake of ginger-beer and fruit, only catching the last train. William had to walk back the four miles which intervened between the Poet's house and ours.

Theophilus told us that, what with the bicycle races, the entertainment in the garden, and William being caught by the policeman in the act of getting through the drawing-room window at one o'clock in the morning because we had bolted the door, forgetting his absence, we had become the talk of the parish.

William, in excuse, said if a man mayn't be his own burglar, what may he be? But the Vicar was really vexed, especially as he had to delay announcing our engagement to his parishioners for a fortnight to allow the scandal to subside. He begged us to be a trifle more ordinary—a little less original in



our behaviour—which advice I impressed upon my relatives. Especially did I urge Belinda to take some flaunting scarlet poppies out of her hat and replace them with flowers of a more sober hue. She complied with reluctance, substituting grey thistles, as an outward and visible sign that her conscience was pricking her within. Grey not becoming her as well as scarlet added a bitterness to her criticisms on life in general, and life in the suburbs in particular.

After Jack came of age we sat in the drawing-room every afternoon from four to six, and took in *The Quiver*, placing it in a conspicuous position to catch the eye of possible callers.



## CHAPTER X.

### WE GO TO AMBULANCE CLASSES.

"YOU'LL be surprised to hear," began Pamela, with a pretty deprecatory air as we sat talking together the following Sunday evening, "that after all I'm not going on the Stage."

William winked himself a congratulatory wink behind *The Pelican*, his favourite weekly, on the success of his non-opposition system. Aloud he feigned disappointment.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Pamela, as I hoped through your influence to be given a free seat occasionally."

"Paper," corrected Olivia technically, "not free, William. Unpaid places are always called paper in the profession."



“ Oh, if the free seats are made of paper,” rejoined William, “ I haven’t lost much; for, taking my weight into consideration, I should have seen most of the play from the floor.”

Olivia scorned further explanation.

“ I’m sorry, William,” sighed Pamela; “ but, you see, I want to do some good in the world, and the Stage, you know, is—is mere play.”

William assented.

“ Sheer tomfoolery, I call it—anyone could do Irving’s part at the Lyceum. I’m sure I could with a little practice. So I’m going to be a hospital nurse,” continued Pamela solemnly.

“ What!” cried Belinda, laying down the book she was reading. “ Well, you won’t see much of me, I can tell you, if you’re going into that nasty profession. I’m not going to catch a fever and be sacrificed to a fashionable fad——”

Here Pamela expressed some doubt as to



whether she should be so anxious to see much of Belinda. On the whole she thought not.

“And if you do catch small-pox,” said I cheerfully, “why it’ll be in a good cause, won’t it?”

“We should always take it on trust that you were really our sister,” added Jack, “for of course if it were only chicken-pox you’d look a bit different from what you do now.”

Pamela rose from the hearthrug, where she had been seated, with as much dignity as a sharp attack of pins-and-needles in one foot would allow.

“I’ve written to all the principal hospitals in London, and asked them to send me particulars. I hadn’t posted the letters because I thought it right to tell you my plans first; but I shall take them to the pillar-box now, this minute!”

Which resolve she carried out immediately.



When the answers came Pamela found that few if any of the hospitals would take her as a probationer for several years to come.

“They seem to consider seventeen—nearly eighteen—quite young!” she cried indignantly, “as if one didn’t know one’s own mind.”

“It’s more a question of not knowing one’s own constitution,” I interrupted soothingly. “However, you can ask them to put your name down as an intending probationer, and there are lots of ways to pass the time between this and the date you enter. Nurses should always be able to cook a little, make beef-tea and jelly, and learn how to make a poultice.”

“But I can cook—at least, I can make curries and ginger-bread—and trim hats, and you can buy poultices ready-make now,” replied Pamela, still in an injured voice; “I saw them at the Stores the other day. But, as you say, Maria, I can put my name down



and wait. Don't tell the others it will be four or five years before I get into a hospital. You're the only one who has any sense in the family."

The Vicar encouraged Pamela in her idea of nursing. He gave his advice with more assurance since we had taken it in the matter of handing over our late boarder's baby to the care of a motherly woman in the neighbourhood, and assured us that having some fixed plan for the future not immediately practicable would prevent Pamela from taking up some occupation hurriedly.

"She's far too young and too pretty to go out into the world alone," concluded the Vicar.

One morning he came in to tell us that the chief doctor of the district, a great friend of his, was starting some lectures on First Aid to the injured in connection with the St. John's Ambulance Society, and advised me to attend them—a clergyman's wife, it ap-



peared, should be educated on the plan of a Jack-of-all-trades—and Pamela by also attending could lay a foundation for her future career.

That was how we came to know Dr. Andrew Macgregor.

Belinda refused to join the classes. She had a great dislike to illness, not from personal experience, for hers was a pattern constitution, but from some innate repulsion.

“I shall die,” she often said, “easily enough when the time comes, without constantly rehearsing beforehand.”

Olivia, always athirst for knowledge, would doubtless have seized the opportunity had she not accepted the invitation of the Poet and his wife to go with them on an excursion to Cornwall, whence she wrote to us, much about sea and sky, tenderly hoping we did not feel the August heat in London. Belinda after reading her letters remarked that Olivia seemed to have forgotten



that the Poet had included the typewriter in the invitation; for her part, travelling with a machine that weighed twenty-four pounds and was liable to being smashed when roughly handled, would have taken the gilt off the gingerbread—otherwise Cornwall.

So through the hot days of August, Pamela and I studied Anatomy. We commenced by learning the names of our own bones, of which we had hitherto been profoundly ignorant. Pamela complained she could never remember them all; she seemed to have as many as a herring. William feared I should find difficulty in locating mine. “Maria,” he observed, with brotherly candour, “is so very well upholstered.”

One morning the Doctor called to tell us that the hour of the Lecture was altered. Belinda only was at home, and promised to give us his message.

“I almost wish I had joined the Classes,”



she added; "I had no idea compound fracture was so interesting."

"Well, it's much too late to commence now," interposed Pamela hastily. "You wouldn't be allowed to go in for the examination—but you might lend us your foot to bandage."

"I can't draw with you tickling my foot," replied Belinda; "but if you take the opportunity any time you see me reading, you're welcome."

We took our opportunity that same afternoon. Belinda was so engrossed with her novel, that she never looked up until we had finished. She was proud of her foot; it took a three, and owned an arched instep. She also held the theory that the truest economy is always to buy the best, and patronised an excellent shoemaker.

We called upon her to admire the bandaging. She gazed upon her supposititiously



injured limb with increasing horror, and grasped my arm nervously.

“You never heard of gout in the family, did you, Maria? You’re the eldest and should study hereditary tendencies. Fancy, if I ever had a foot like that—take it off! oh, take it off! It makes me feel sick to look at it.”

Not a word about our neat bandaging.

William had no vanity. He lent himself, corporally, when at home with his usual large generosity. When he was out we made shift with Jack’s lay figure, for in constant practice lay success. After the third Lecture our knowledge of bandaging was extensive; to keep it in mind whilst we turned our attention to fits, bites, burns, &c., which formed the subjects of the succeeding Lectures, we bandaged William’s entire frame every evening. It was a long and rather inelegant frame, as we told its owner as he lay stretched upon the ever useful ironing-board; but he



heard not the remark, having dropped into a peaceful slumber.

“Here, wake up,” cried Pamela rudely, “and apologise for only having one head, when we are both weak about the exact method of doing dislocated jaw-bones!”

“You’ve got an arm each, and a leg,” grumbled the patient, resentful at being awakened.

“You can have his head, Pamela; I dare say Theophilus will lend me his to-morrow morning. You not being engaged to him, might not care to ask for the loan.”

“I shouldn’t,” retorted Pamela; “the brilliantine Theophilus uses is most objectionable.”

I let this libel pass uncontradicted, being much engaged upon a fracture of William’s forearm. Now and again we dropped a chocolate into his mouth to keep him contented. When half an hour had gone by, there was very little of the patient unbandaged. So in-



teresting did he look from a surgical point of view, that we begged him to remain quiet whilst we rested and admired our handiwork.

As we sat silent, the Vicar walked in through the open door; he had been away on his holiday, and had not witnessed our progress in applying aid to the injured.

His first glance was—properly—toward me. It was a nice glance, and I wished the room were not so full of my relations. Then his eye fell upon William. The light of love died out, and an expression of concern shadowed his countenance. Making a step forward, he cried:

“William, my dear boy, an accident—your bicycle, alas!——”

William had no histrionic ability. The groan he gave was inartistic, testifying to a healthy and uninjured constitution. No battered frame could have emitted a groan of such strength and vigour. Jack burst into



a roar of laughter, heedless that the modern house has no foundations.

Then William arose, stiffly, for our work was well done, and started a hornpipe. Belinda caught him at the piano with a jig of her own composing. The bandages became unfastened, and flew round and round in widening circles, until he looked like a windmill in a high gale decorated with ribbons. The splints fell off one by one as their binding loosened. Mary came in to ask the cause of the disturbance.

“Lor, Master William, talk about an odds-and-ends dance, it’s better than Miss B’linda’s!”

The Vicar’s face showed some trepidation that our late proper and uninteresting conduct was not likely to endure.

Writing to Uncle Joshua early the next morning, it occurred to me that he would be interested to hear about the Ambulance



Lectures. I began by describing the Doctor.

“He is” (I wrote) “a Scotchman—very tall with a short black beard and a sunburnt complexion. His name is Macgregor.”

On reading this over it sounded poor, and conveyed nothing of the Doctor’s personality. Perhaps Belinda could supply me with a descriptive phrase or two. She had of late developed a contempt for the jokes that had served us so long through so many happy years, and developed a wit of her own; she might hit upon an epigram to describe the Doctor. I went to find her.

“How,” I began, “would you describe the Doctor?”

“I shouldn’t describe him,” she answered irritably. “I should say his name was Macgregor; that in itself describes him.”

“But if you wanted to mention his chief characteristics, for instance?”

“You could walk on his accent without



falling through," replied the fashion artist, pushing back her chair and looking critically at her drawing.

"I rather like the way the ends of his sentences go uphill, myself," I hazarded.

But Belinda didn't. She pronounced it Edinburgh. I gather from her further remarks that an accent is like a prophet—it has no honour in its own country.

Then I tried Jack, who said:

"The Doctor—well, he smokes ripping tobacco!"

Pamela I found gazing dreamily out of an upstairs window. A garment that required mending lay neglected near her. My query was getting a little stereotyped.

"What do you think of the Doctor?"

Pamela started, and blushed a vivid crimson.

"Think? How did you know I was thinking of the Doctor, Maria?"

I did not until she had herself informed me.



“I’m just writing to Uncle,” I explained, “and I can’t find any suitable adjectives to describe the Doctor. This sounds poor.” And I read out what I had written.

“I should think it does,” she assented. “Why, you haven’t said half—you’ve left out his eyes!”

“What about them—does he squint?”

“They’re a lovely clear grey, and can see through and through.”

“Through what?”

“His patients, of course.”

“Well, a good many invalids are hum-bugs,” I admitted; “but not all, surely.”

“I meant their ailments, of course. How silly you are this morning! He can diagnose at a glance,” concluded Pamela, remembering the correct phrase at last.

“I made a note faintly in pencil on my letter:

“Doctor’s eyes—principle of new photography—sees inside out.”



“What else?” I inquired aloud.

“Oh, then there’s his figure. Tell Uncle how athletic he is—he used to be in the County Eleven. He’s so strong, yet he’s so gentle. Have you noticed, Maria, how determined he is in getting his own way—yet so quietly, one hardly knows one has given in?”

Pamela paused. I made more notes on my letter, but I doubted whether Uncle would be interested. I could imagine him saying:

“I suppose the man gives lectures to fill up the time between seeing his patients.”

“Thanks!” I cried at last, when Pamela had finished enumerating the Doctor’s good points, both personal and professional, “that will do nicely; now I’ll leave you to your mending.”

She picked up the garment in some confusion, and I went to finish my letter. But it never was finished. I wrote a postcard instead, saying we were all alive, and hoped



Uncle was the same; it was too warm to enter into details. Nevertheless I spent an hour with the pen in my hand, idly drawing on the blotting-paper; and sometimes I drew the face of Pamela, and sometimes the face of Andrew Macgregor. Pamela's face was of the type that conveys the impression of a heart that surrenders at once where it loves—at once, freely, and for ever. Not like Belinda, whose delight was to torture what attracted her, and who before many years had passed over her head had left more than one man in doubt as to whether he hated or loved her the most, and quite certain that it was possible to do both at once. Then I drew Theophilus and got a better likeness, until a blot fell from the pen and totally obliterated one eye, giving him a prize-fighting appearance not at one with his clerical tie and collar. I decided on a plan of action.

“Theophilus,” I began that evening, for he generally came for a short call after sup-



per, "would you—could you—would it be very mean for you who know the Doctor so well to find out what he thinks of Pamela?"

The Vicar was somewhat dense, I confess it, though I frequently stood up for him when he was not present when this failing was mentioned. He grew pale—or perhaps it was the moonlight, for we were seated in the garden.

"She does look delicate," he replied thoughtfully. "That pink and white complexion. But has he seen her professionally?"

I explained that it was love I feared, not consumption, though, as someone of discrimination has pointed out, they are frequently one and the same thing.

"We have seen the Doctor several times—often, in fact, besides going to the Lectures. Pamela is very young, and suppose—I don't know that she does—but just suppose she liked him, and he didn't return——"



“What then?” asked the Vicar. Men always require a sentence to be finished, the two first words convey the situation to a woman. “Do you think she would fret herself ill, or what?”

“Oh,” I cried, “it would hurt so! All the world would be like a suburb, and every day like—like Sunday!”

I looked at my companion, expecting to see that struggle between his duty to reprove and his desire to forgive so often written on his countenance, but it was adorned by a smile only—a self-deprecatory smile, as one might wear who had been given more than his measure of happiness.

“Would you have felt like that, if I hadn’t—hadn’t—Maria?”

After an interval, I remarked casually:

“Do you know, I’ve noticed, Theo, since William pointed it out to me, that whatever subject we start talking about, you invariably



contrive to bring the conversation round to your own affairs? ”

“ Oh, William said that, did he? Well, I must say there’s nothing like getting engaged to become acquainted with one’s own faults.”

“ Indeed, Belinda says she’s sure I shall discover something terrible about you—when we are married. She has an idea that people with few faults have some dreadful vice in the background.”

“ Belinda’s a naughty little puss,” said the Vicar.

It appeared time to go in.

Theophilus delicately introduced Pamela as a topic of conversation when, soon after, he had a chat with Dr. Macgregor, and was rewarded by his friend’s full confidence.

“ It’s all right. There isn’t a man more in love in the whole of Brick Park than Macgregor, except myself, of course.”

“ What did he say? ”



“ Say! what didn’t he say? I went for ten minutes, and had to listen for a couple of hours. He said she was lovely—he loved her—he wasn’t worthy of her love, but then what man could be? Would I say a good word for him to you and Belinda, especially Belinda? ”

“ Belinda again? ” I ejaculated.

“ Yes, it appears when dealing with your family you can’t reckon without Belinda. Macgregor says she has a great deal of character, and might perhaps influence Pamela against him. I told him,” added Theophilus gleefully, “ that Belinda laughed at him.”

“ Oh, you did, did you? And how did you know, pray? ”

“ Oh, I guessed,” responded the Vicar lamely. “ Belinda laughs at everybody.”

“ Including you,” I reminded him, for what right had he to give Belinda away? My doing so was another matter. She was



my own sister, and if you can't give away your own, what can you give?

The Vicar seemed to know what was passing in my mind, for he said:

“What's yours is mine, Maria.”



## CHAPTER XI.

WE REQUIRE THE DOCTOR PROFESSIONALLY.

THEOPHILUS, though undeniably wanting in humour, proved himself the possessor of much sympathy when Pamela fell ill toward the beginning of September.

The examination on the Ambulance Lectures and all its consequent excitement being over left nothing behind it but to wait and wonder when we should hear whether we deserved a certificate or no.

I found much difficulty in recollecting the directions for restoring the apparently drowned. On confiding this lapse of memory to Belinda, she begged me to read the subject up again:

“For it has rained so much of late,” she



explained, "that I am beginning to get quite nervous!"

This, of course, was an exaggerated apprehension. Still, it had rained persistently, and when the hot August sun shone out at intervals, the steam rose in a sultry mist from the ground, wrapping us in a continual vapour bath. Belinda openly envied Olivia's visit to Cornwall, even accompanied by the typewriter. Her editor thought she was out of town, she herself having led him to this supposition.

"He would presume if he knew I stayed in the suburbs all August, and be asking me to touch up the prize competition drawings, or something equally undesirable."

So Belinda was away on the moors in Yorkshire; having done three weeks' work in advance, she went with a clear conscience. When the proper time had elapsed she was again seen haunting a certain office in Fleet Street. Her return was hailed



by a compliment on her invigorated appearance.

“I wish I could get away,” sighed the editorial martyr to fashions.

“The sea is so cool after London,” murmured his contributor, forgetting the moors had been her destination.

“He declared I brought a whiff of sea-air into the room with me,” said Belinda when recounting this conversation, “which speaks well for Tidman’s, which I use every morning since I learnt that we have gout as well as Art in the family.”

The boys went on a bicycle tour, for William had a *bonâ-fide* holiday, and Jack, lucky being, was now successful enough to arrange his own leisure. We urged Pamela to write, or let us write, reminding Uncle of his promise to invite her to stay with him, but she declared it would break her heart to go alone to Riverside, where she had once been so happy. Considering her youth, and hitherto happy



existence, Pamela, at this juncture of her life, was strangely partial to speaking and dwelling upon the past. She did not seem to take any interest in the present, and never spoke at all of the future. Possessed by some inability to settle down to any occupation, she dragged poor Jinks for miles along the hot suburban roads, until in pity for the animal we clipped him close, when he looked, as Mary expressed it, "for all the world like a Skye poodle!"

One afternoon she started for a long drive on the top of an omnibus, though it threatened the usual rain, and returned wet and shivering. Mary, who still treated her youngest "young lady" much as a child, helped her to bed.

"And there you'll stay, Miss, for a couple of days, or my name isn't Mary."

But the next morning showed that it would take more than a couple of days for Pamela to recover. We grew anxious when



she sat up in bed querulously persisting that she must get up and arrange her room differently. Why had we moved everything from the place she liked it to be? Her mind had wandered to her old room at The Court, and all sense of her real surroundings had faded.

“We must send for the Doctor,” I said to Belinda.

“It hardly seems correct,” replied my sister, I thought at random until she continued: “Even you, unobservant though you are, must have noticed that Pamela is desperately in love with Macgregor. Suppose she grew delirious, and told him so, she would never forgive us—yet if we send for another it will look strange——”

“He’s in love with her too,” I interrupted, and Belinda looked relieved.

“You might have told me before, Maria; you don’t know how it’s worried me to see the child so unhappy.”



Belinda, though so casual on the surface, was really very affectionate.

“I might contrive to meet the Vicar after matins, and ask his opinion.”

“I think you might—you’ve done it so often on your own account, that you might do it again on somebody else’s.”

The Vicar acted with decision. “Macgregor’s away on his holiday. Didn’t you know? But I’ll go myself for his partner.”

When the doctor arrived, he told us that Pamela had congestion of both lungs, and must have the most careful nursing.

“You must have a hospital nurse, Miss Chilcott. It’s a pity,” he added kindly, “that Macgregor’s classes weren’t on ‘Sick Nursing’ in stead of ‘First Aid,’ as then you might have done without a professional.”

The nurse, a model of calm, orderly, yet sympathetic nursing, presented such a dainty picture in her soft grey dress, and pretty white cap and apron, that we feared she would



encourage Pamela in her notion of taking up nursing as a profession. We would not allow ourselves to think it possible for her never to get better at first, though the day came later when we had to admit there was a chance of her not being with us to choose any career at all.

We wrote to Olivia, telling her to return at once. Olivia loved her sister with a passionate devotion, which did not prevent them quarrelling frequently. The aim of her life was to become known—as a poetess for choice—and to make money, for which she feared it necessary to descend into the arena of fiction—and then to have Pamela to live with her, when every wish of that young person's heart was to be gratified, and her beauty to be the shrine at which many—and here she did not wish all to be Bohemian—were to worship.

And we wrote to Uncle, saying we would telegraph bad news and send a postcard of



report every evening. We told him we had a nurse, also qualms as to how we were to meet expenses. He replied, expressing great anxiety, and saying he considered he had adopted our expenses for the present.

The boys' address we knew not. They had left so gaily, never anticipating anything out-of-the-way would occur in their absence. Jack had sent a few illustrations of incidents that had occurred on the way, without a line; even the postmark on the envelope being unintelligible.

"The drawings," remarked Belinda, "explain themselves; mostly, I notice, to William's disadvantage."

They were due in a few days, for William's holiday leave would then expire. We dreaded to see his smile, as broad as it would be welcome, fade when we told him his sister's life was in danger.

For Pamela grew worse as each hot day



lingered and faded, giving place to the sultry night.

“She’ll be better or worse before the evening,” said the doctor at his early visit; and we understood him to mean the crisis was approaching.

“Andrew will be here by twelve,” said the Vicar, suddenly. “I wrote to him to come. This is no time to think of propriety.”

When he came, bringing with him an atmosphere of quiet self-reliance, he went straight upstairs; only stopping to whisper he would come down at intervals to give us his opinion.

Olivia sat outside Pamela’s door, which was as near as she was allowed, her arms folded round her knees, leaning disconsolately against the door-post and bitterly reproaching herself that she had ever gone to Cornwall. Olivia had a feeling, shared by many, that everything went wrong when she wasn’t present; though no one else could trace any



link between her absence and the catastrophe.

Belinda sat sketching in the conservatory, where she did most of her work in the mornings, not admitting there was any possible cause for anxiety, and speaking, as was her habit, as if she personally conducted circumstances. Nevertheless, her drawing consisted mainly of rubbing out and sharpening pencils. Presently she found the heat striking on the glass above her head overwhelming, and looking through the dining-room and folding-doors, saw Theophilus and me seated in cooler comfort in the drawing-room. With one hand he held a newspaper, which he appeared to be reading, but I think he was praying; the other was clasped in mine. Belinda came in and sat down wearily, he dropped the paper and held out that hand to her with a smile. She took it absently, after the method she kept for pulling Jinkie's ears, and we sat in silence.



Mary stood at the back door to warn any tradesman's boy entering to come quietly. In our small house every sound could be heard upstairs distinctly. Now and again she made a dive out into the road to silence some barrel-organ. One immigrant from the Italian shores, new to the ways of the London maidservant, not understanding her gesticulations, started playing; whereupon she first shoo'd at him with her apron, as if dispersing chickens, and then seized his piano by both handles and wheeled it to the turning of the road, pointing the way by which he was to vanish. He went, obediently, fearful of having done something illegal.

So we sat on through the interminable morning; now and again the Doctor crept down in stockinged feet to say there was no change; and once Olivia, who had fallen asleep, woke hastily, and overcome by anxiety, crept down to lay her head in my lap and sob wearily. She always feared the



worst, having a temperament strangely compounded of pessimism and humour.

A slight commotion, subdued yet excited, roused us to find out its reason. Creeping into the hall, we were confronted by Uncle Joshua and a porter with his luggage. The little man looked white and apprehensive; we beckoned him into the dining-room, and whispered our welcome and reports of the invalid. Mary brought in some tea, but he would not touch it. Looking the picture of desolation, he kept wandering from end to end of the room, muttering:

“All my fault, all my fault, too!”

“I tell you what it is, Uncle,” said Belinda, “you’ve run down, and got morbid and nervous. You’ve been living on weak tea and radishes—don’t deny it, weak tea and radishes!”

Uncle sat down by the table and gazed at her in a helpless, irresponsible fashion for a minute or so; then some funny side of the



situation, unknown to us, appealed to him suddenly. He fell forward with his head on the table shaking with suppressed laughter, the result of alighting on comedy where only tragedy was expected.

Andrew strode silently into the room; he frowned, who was this person overcome by such untimely hilarity? He made a step forward, and putting a strong hand on Uncle's coat-collar, pushed rather than led him through the conservatory into the garden. Olivia followed, whispering:

“It's Uncle, and he's not really laughing.”

It was two hours later, when we again heard the creak that the Doctor's huge form caused the stairs to utter as he crept down them. We rose and moved toward the door, feeling instinctively he had more to tell us.

The joy of victory showed in every line of his face—the triumph of life over death—joy for the life of the woman he loved, as well as



his professional joy over the patient that recovereth.

“She’s asleep,” he whispered, “and will wake to know us.”

Theophilus opened his arms, and I fell into them; Olivia, having considerable advantage in the matter of height, fell on Uncle; and Belinda—well, Belinda kissed the Doctor.

“And if I did,” she said afterward when rallied on this action, “what then? You might know, as you went to Ambulance Lectures, that when a tension of mind breaks—if it breaks the wrong way, you faint, and if it breaks the right—you kiss what’s nearest. Besides, a kiss is like a quarrel, it takes two to make it!”

Pamela lay very white and shadowy, but very beautiful, when one by one we were allowed to sit with her; the weather turned cooler and drier, and she mended with every morning. When the boys returned, they af-



fect to believe that we had exaggerated matters; but that was only to hide any display of feeling.

Belinda showed her thankfulness her own way; she bought some pretty blue flannel and fashioned into a smart little sitting-up jacket. She sang like a lark as she cut it out, sewed, and finished it all in one morning, and then called upon the whole household to admire her in it. It was a mass of frills and, edged with lace and ribbon, the stitches were by no means invisible.

“Of course we could have bought one for less than this cost in a shop, girls; but it wouldn’t have pleased the child like this will.”

Belinda’s economy ever lay in getting style for her money.

The Doctor—so we heard—reproved his colleague sharply for not having sent for him sooner.

“I’m na saying you haven’t abeelity,” he



said, growing Scotch in his wrath, "but you have also youth and inexperience."

"There were no complications," replied the younger man, a little ruffled.

"None that you understood," retorted his senior rudely.



## CHAPTER XII.

### THE CONCLUSION OF THE WHOLE MATTER.

“I’M not going to be a hospital nurse, after all—not because I’ve changed my mind, but because I’m going to marry the Doctor.”

Pamela was too deeply absorbed in—too shyly elated at her news to observe that our surprise was a little over-acted.

We kissed and congratulated her each after our individual fashion.

“It seems,” exclaimed Olivia, christening the new joy with a few excited tears, “almost like having another clergyman in the family.”

We pressed her to explain, when it turned out that the Doctor was so Scotch, talking to him was nearly as bad—or as good—as reading a modern Scotch novel; and Scotch



novelists seemed always to be ministers—more or less. Olivia's reasoning was so local, confined entirely to her own brain region.

When the excitement had subsided, Belinda, though on the whole greatly pleased, could not refrain from fearing—aloud—that both Pamela and I had been guilty of a social indiscretion.

“It is considered bad form,” said the oracle, “to fall in love with people whom you meet professionally—like the Vicar, or the Doctor. Yet perhaps, when the alternative is to earn your living, a little error of taste may be excused.”

Olivia blushed hotly as the speaker enlarged upon our lapse from the narrow way of etiquette, and observed, sarcastically, that if one waited to meet people without reference to their occupation there was a good deal of danger of dying an old maid.

“Besides, in these days,” she concluded, “a man's profession is like his shadow, al-



ways with him. The only time he forgets it is at luncheon, even shadows are off duty in the middle of the day."

Pamela affected indifference to this bone of contention; her pretty little air of superiority toward them both exasperated the former exceedingly, and caused the latter to appear constantly on the brink of telling something, and then drawing back as if afraid to part with her secret.

Mary, astonished at the turn events had taken, cast about in her mind for some means of breaking her promise to me without giving offence, so that she could "take service" with her dear Miss Pamela. She had a deep respect for Olivia's cleverness, but turned to Belinda for help in this difficulty.

"For how Miss Pamela will get along without me when she becomes Mrs. Andrew Macgregory is more than I can tell on. I've promised Miss Maria, and a promise is a promise. Do you think, Miss B'linda, that



if I was to cook reglar awful for a few days, Miss Maria would give me notice beforehand, so to speak? ”

Belinda thought not.

“ You see, Mary, Miss Maria never seems to know what she’s eating lately, though she used to be very particular—even greedy. And I don’t care about being hungry, as I should be if you cooked badly. No, you must think of another plan.”

Finally Mary remembered she was “ chapel,” obviously it would be injurious to her conscience to “ take service ” with the Church.

I agreed that it would, and she left the room beaming, to tell Pamela that she was “ given up by Miss Maria,” merely on account of sectarian differences.

Uncle, who had left London when Pamela was convalescent, wrote from the country asking us all to spend a month with him. But there were unfortunately obstacles in the



way of this pleasant arrangement. William, for one, could not go; his holiday was over. Of late he had become irked by the narrowness of his life and the impossibility of rising unaided above a mere clerkship. He had dreams—a boy's rose-coloured dreams of the ease with which a fortune is to be made on other and alien shores; but to leave England meant saving money for a start, and to save meant unceasing application to his work in hand.

And Belinda's holiday was over. She wished she had sacrificed appearances and admitted being in town through August.

"I never thought of this happening!" she exclaimed disgustedly.

Olivia too found duty imperative, which was not surprising, seeing her holiday had stretched over a couple of months.

"You might ask for one more week," suggested Jack, who held a slight opinion of his sister officially.



But Olivia was resolute.

“It would be unreasonable—and—and there’s my portrait, too, to be finished. The light will be dark in November,” she added, confusedly.

Uncle replied to our objections by hoping that we could all spare from a Saturday to Monday; he ordered us to come in fact, having a little surprise ready for us.

Jack, whose too sedentary occupation reflected upon his spirits, felt sure that Joshua was intent upon marriage.

“Which will do away with any chance of my coming into The Court,” he sighed, “as eldest nephew and heir presumptive.”

“Yes, you may depend upon it,” agreed Belinda, “that he’s going to be married. Have you never noticed how events move in threes—first Maria, then Pamela; oh, there’s sure to be a third make a fool of themselves!”

Olivia rose suddenly from the table—this discussion took place during luncheon—on



pretence of wanting some Worcester sauce with her custard. She often got up quickly at meals instead of ringing the bell, much to our discomfort; and would return after a short sojourn in the kitchen, looking as if she had helped herself to mustard in the passage and found it warmer than she had expected.

Belinda insisted on us wearing the best our wardrobes would afford during our short stay at Riverside Court.

“For then, if the surprise is of a pleasant sort,” she argued, “we shall at least look as if we had a right to the pleasures of life; and if it is of the unpleasant order, why we shall derive moral support from our clothes and appear indifferent to mere circumstances. I have always held, myself, that half the vaunted repose of Vere de Vere was founded upon a French dressmaker.”

A few hours later we were treading the platform of a familiar station. There was no



one to meet us—so we thought, until after a moment's hesitation a smart footman standing near Jack touched his hat with an interrogative "Mr. Chilcott, sir?" and led the way to a light wagonette drawn up outside the station.

"Uncle's been deceiving us," scribbled Belinda on her pocket notebook. "I guessed so all along, but you must pretend to be surprised, to please him." This she passed round for each to read, talking loudly the while of some changes in the road made since our departure.

Uncle Joshua stood by the gate, a pleasant smile of welcome on his face, shadowed by a nervousness as to how we were taking his "surprise." The house as we had known it was there in all its picturesque familiarity; but oh, the difference inside and in the garden! The lawn, once so full of dips and bumps that it served almost equally well for golf-links or tennis-courts, now lay one great



expanse of green, smooth, close-cut turf, and the half-dozen little terraces which led from it to the river were filled with trails of blossoming creepers, making one great bank of colour.

We felt in a land of dreams as Uncle led the way over the bridge across the river and into the kitchen-garden, showing this and that improvement and alteration proudly, yet anxious withal to assure us that none of the trees or shrubs—the old familiar landmarks of our youth—had been touched, none of the quaint irregularity of the paths interfered with.

“I shall never forget how Olivia dropped tears upon this laurel-bush the day you left,” he said. “I nearly let it all out that morning; but I wanted to see how you would get on alone, and how you would treat me if I were a poor man, though originally I only meant you to be away while the house was done up; but you were so sure that I meant



to turn you out, it amused me to let things drift awhile. By-the-by," he continued politely, "has the smell of varnish vacated your room yet?"

"I'm having my portrait painted," answered Olivia with irrelevant haste; perhaps the word varnish recalled the Academician.

"Indeed; I hope I may be allowed the first offer to purchase. It shall be the foundation of a modest collection."

"Oh, but it's—he's Brown, R.A., you know," continued Olivia proudly.

"Oh, he's Brown, R.A., is he? Well, perhaps even Brown, R.A., will sell it to the South African pauper."

This nickname fell guiltily upon our ears; how had he come to know of it?

The boys were very silent, for men are constitutionally averse to having "coals of fire" heaped upon their heads. Women, on the other hand, feel they have the power to equalise matters by being gracious.



Uncle left us together by the dog kennels a minute while he talked to a gardener.

The kennels—where we had held debates on many matters, discussed books, formed plans, joked, quarrelled, made friends again, and been sufficient unto ourselves and careless of everything else to an extent only understood by those who have made one of a large company of sisters and brothers. The place was strangely silent, no friendly yelp broke in upon an argument, or turned a youthfully sententious speech to ridicule. Jinks we had left against his will in London, and the puppies, like ourselves, had gone out into the world.

The first chillness of Autumn crisped the September sunshine, almost the first leaf to fall fluttered to our feet. We felt afraid to look into each other's eyes lest we should read regret. For young and old alike, Melancholy marks memory for her own. Of course Uncle meant our visit kindly, and we



would be cheerful, even facetious, for his sake, but we realised for the first time that soon we should be separated: Pamela and I would have new homes, new interests, new cares maybe. William would be across the seas.

Poor Jack, as he looked round upon the improved and glorified edition of his old home, felt his last hope of passing a peaceful old age—he had always looked forward to a peaceful old age surrounded by a quantity of tobacco—slipping fast away from him. He might just as well die as spend his declining years anywhere else.

“Why do you look so glum, Jack?” queried Belinda, herself the only entirely cheerful one.

“Of course he’ll marry,” murmured Jack in reply.

“And have ten children,” asserted Olivia sweepingly.

“Not if I can help it!” cried Belinda, re-



plying to Jack, though it sounded as if she meant to interfere to prevent the second prophecy.

“He has a right to be happy,” maintained Pamela stoutly.

“Ah! you, of course, are a judge in such matters,” put in William.

“Well, it’s the place I care for, not the money,” said Jack again, throwing pebbles into the river.

If Uncle had criticised our suburban furnishing with candour, we returned the compliment freely, when on returning to the house we found it redecorated as well as refurnished from the gabled attics to the cellars underground.

“Excellent taste, Uncle,” this from Belinda, “exquisite colouring. No makeshift or imitation here: of course you didn’t do it yourself; but the arranging—why, there’s none; it’s simply thrown together. It wants a woman to do that for you.”



She stopped to pull a chair forward and push another back, draw down a blind half-way, and gather a curtain into graceful folds. The room at once gained in grace and hospitality.

“That’s just it!” cried Joshua delightedly; “just what I’ve been saying to myself—it wants a woman.” And he looked round for general assent.

So the blow had fallen. He had asked us down to make acquaintance with a prospective aunt. After all, the surprise partook more of the unpleasant order. I tried to derive the promised moral support from my best parasol; it was an *en tout cas*, and guaranteed serviceable for all weathers.

“You will be getting married, Uncle?” I hazarded.

A shadow fell on Joshua Chilcott’s face.

“I should have married years ago,” he said simply; “but she—she died. I shall never marry now, children.”



That last word told us all we wanted to know, but for the moment we forgot our own hopes and fears. My eyes filled with tears, and Pamela's too were full as she took Uncle's hand between her own and held it very close. Olivia's young face grew still and grave. Why? She had not experienced Love, that comes as a thief in the night, and makes or mars a life's happiness!

Belinda murmured something sympathetic, but it was Jack's arm she squeezed, not Uncle's.

. . . . .

Christmas time saw us again visiting The Court. We had returned to town after that September day when we learned that Uncle stood—financially—somewhere half-way between a millionaire and a pauper. Much had happened in the autumn. We gave up our little house in Triangle Lawn, and removed the furniture to a bright roomy studio in a more fashionable locality, where



Jack decided to continue his artistic struggles, after exchanging the pen of the illustrator for the brush and palette of oil-colours.

Olivia, whom nothing would tempt from London for long, offered Jack her services as housekeeper, and Mary offered hers as domestic until "Mrs. Andrew Macgregory" should need her. He accepted both cheerfully. Uncle gave them each an allowance larger than our whole united income had been previously. The intellectual atmosphere of literary and artistic Bohemia, combined with lavish personal expenditure, suited Olivia exactly, and acted as a stimulus to her own ambitions. She published a book of poems under her own name in which pessimism and humour struggled for supremacy, became a prominent member of an æsthetic club, and refurnished the studio at intervals of a few weeks or so.

William, installed as Uncle's man of business, with a trip to South Africa in prospect,



lived for some time in a continual state of feeling he would wake up suddenly, for, as he expressed it, it was out of all reason to begin life at the wrong end of the ladder. He was seen frequently to measure himself round the waist, and on finding it still of respectably moderate dimensions, concluded he was the first instance on record of prosperity having come to anyone without bringing an increase of flesh in proportion.

Belinda, on the contrary, took to riches as a duckling to water; her one trial was when there were so many charming *rôles* for the young and modern woman of money to play, that she could not decide which line to adopt, when all were so fascinating.

“For of course I shall succeed in whatever I take up,” she explained modestly.

“And we, knowing her so well, could not deny it.

Andrew and Theophilus contrived to spend the New Year with us. Uncle had in-



sisted upon a year elapsing before we were to marry.

“To give us time to think about settlements,” was his way of putting it.

This delay did not prevent Pamela from deciding every detail of the ceremony. She declared the bridesmaids’ dresses—we were both to be married on the same day—should be blue, a shade to which Olivia objected.

“What would you have then?” asked Pamela, anxious to be conciliatory in her happiness.

“Brown, R.A.,” replied Olivia dreamily, and went on to tell us how she had promised to take that colour for better or worse through life.

“Well, it’s a good wearing colour,” said the Vicar thoughtfully.

“And he’s a good fellow,” added Jack, who had been let into the secret some time back.

Andrew turned to Belinda, who stood be-



side Uncle, Jinks at her feet, all three looking out of the window.

“When are you going to follow our example?” he began teasingly.

“I mean to have a good time first—with Uncle.”

And the Doctor looked—as he was meant to look—foolish.

And Belinda is—as yet, Belinda.

THE END.



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2. *Eve.* By S. BARING-GOULD.
3. *For Fifteen Years.* By L. ULBACH.
4. *A Counsel of Perfection.* By L. MALET.
5. *The Deemster.* By H. CAINE.
- 5½. *The Bondman.* By H. CAINE.
6. *A Virginia Inheritance.* By E. PENDLETON.
7. *Ninette.* By the author of *Véra*.
8. "*The Right Honourable.*" By J. MCCARTHY and Mrs. CAMPBELL-PRAED.
9. *The Silence of Dean Maitland.* By M. GRAY.
10. *Mrs. Lorimer.* By L. MALET.
11. *The Elect Lady.* By G. MACDONALD.
12. *The Mystery of the "Ocean Star."* By W. C. RUSSELL.
13. *Aristocracy.*
14. *A Recoiling Vengeance.* By F. BARRETT.
15. *The Secret of Fontaine-la-Croix.* By M. FIELD.
16. *The Master of Rathkelly.* By H. SMART.
17. *Donovan.* By E. LYALL.
18. *This Mortal Coil.* By G. ALLEN.
19. *A Fair Emigrant.* By R. MULHOLLAND.
20. *The Apostate.* By E. DAUDET.
21. *Raleigh Westgate.* By H. K. JOHNSON.
22. *Arius the Libyan.*
23. *Constance, and Calbot's Rival.* By J. HAWTHORNE.
24. *We Two.* By E. LYALL.
25. *A Dreamer of Dreams.* By the author of *Thoth*.
26. *The Ladies' Gallery.* By J. MCCARTHY and Mrs. CAMPBELL-PRAED.
27. *The Reproach of Annesley.* By M. GRAY.
28. *Near to Happiness.*
29. *In the Wire Grass.* By L. PENDLETON.
30. *Lace.* By P. LINDAU.
- 30½. *The Black Poodle.* By F. ANSTEY.
31. *American Coin.* By the author of *Aristocracy*.
32. *Won by Waiting.* By E. LYALL.
33. *The Story of Helen Davenant.* By V. FANE.
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35. *Mistress Beatrice Cope.* By M. E. LE CLERC.
36. *The Knight-Errant.* By E. LYALL.
37. *In the Golden Days.* By E. LYALL.
38. *Gibaldi.* By R. G. DERING.
39. *A Hardy Norseman.* By E. LYALL.
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44. *Blind Love.* By W. COLLINS.
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49. *Djambek the Georgian.* By A. G. VON SUTTNER.
50. *The Craze of Christian Engelhart.* By H. F. DARNELL.
51. *Lal.* By W. A. HAMMOND, M. D.
52. *Aline.* By H. GRÉVILLE.
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